

# Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

Libraries • Policy • Technology • Media

Volume 11, Number 9: October 2011

ISSN 1534-0937

Walt Crawford

## Making it Work

### Websites and Social Networks

If you're expecting a Major Piece on library use of social networks—or, for that matter, a Major Piece on library websites—you're going to be disappointed. I'm working on a *very* major piece on public library use of two large social networks, a book (from ALA Editions, probably out in late 2012, title not yet set). I've just completed the first pass at background research for that book. The first part of this essay discusses the sampling done in that pass and the bias revealed in that sampling. The second part offers some thoughts on public library websites—and *finding* those websites—based on what I've seen during that pass. The third part discusses a few items I'd tagged as related to libraries and librarians and their presence in social networks.

What I'm *not* about to do: Tell you how your public library's website should look or work. There are plenty of library folk who are happy to serve as gurus in that area, most of them with a lot more hands-on experience in creating public library websites than I have (since I have none), *all* of them with much stronger opinions on how public library websites *should* look and work. Nor, for that matter, will the second section offer a clear description of how they do work, although I'll offer some notes on what I, as a user, hope to see on a public library website. I didn't take notes on websites except in a couple of areas, as my purpose in visiting websites was to see whether the libraries used Twitter or Facebook and, if so, to link to those instances. This is anecdotal: musings, not assertions.

### Sampling Library Websites

I looked at a *lot* of public library websites between July 26, 2011 and August 22, 2011. I would say 2,406 of them—but that's not true. I looked *for* pub-

lic library websites for 2,406 libraries/library agencies (let's call them "libraries," although that includes library *systems* that report statistics to the state library), but in 176 cases—7.3%—I didn't find sites that I considered to be legitimate library websites. (What? There are library websites that *aren't* legitimate? Lots of them: We'll get to that a little later.)

### *The Sample*

The sample of public library websites is intended to be a reasonable cross-section of America's public libraries. It began as a small sample (California and at least one other state) and became an odd halfway survey.

I downloaded library names (or city or county names, as appropriate) and legal service area populations for the libraries in 25 U.S. states—primarily states that actually offer that data within spreadsheets as part of their state library statistics, although in a couple of cases I copied the data from either Word or PDF reports.

## Inside This Issue

T&QT Retrospective: Far-Away Services with Strange Sounding Names.....	17
Offtopic Perspective: 50 Movie Comedy Kings 1.....	22

While I included half of the states, I did *not* include half of the libraries. As defined by state agencies and reported to the Institute of Museum and Library Science—or, in this case, as used in the latest HAPLR figures, since those include a useful breakdown of libraries by population served—there are 9,184 public libraries, so my sample only includes 26% of the libraries. On the other hand, the libraries I sampled serve a total of more than 165 million people, considerably more than half the nation's total (even including double-counting, which happens in a few cases). So that's half the states, more than half the population—but just over one-quarter of the libraries.

Here's the list of states, in descending order by the sum of service area population in all libraries combined: California, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Minnesota, New Jersey, Arizona, Washington,

Maryland, Missouri, Colorado, Louisiana, South Carolina, Kentucky, Oregon, Connecticut, Mississippi, Utah, Nevada, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Idaho, Montana, Alaska, Wyoming.

That list is very strong in the Old West and Far West, fairly strong in the South and weak in New England and the Midwest. I believe it's a good cross-section of large and small, urban and rural states. The bias is—other than California, my starting point—deliberate: Except for New Jersey, studied before I realized there was a problem, it's biased toward states with relatively few reporting libraries, so that I could include quite a few different states while still being able to do the sampling in a reasonable amount of time. (So, for example, California has 181 library units serving more than 37 million people—while New York has 756 serving some 19 million and Iowa has 541 serving some three million.)

### The Bias

I'll point to Wyoming, New Mexico, Montana and Alaska, at the very least, to suggest that it would be inappropriate to accuse me of ignoring smaller and rural libraries—but it's true that the bias toward fewer reporting agencies results in an oversampling of larger libraries and an undersampling of smaller ones.

How serious is that bias? If you use one common dividing line between larger (“urban”) and smaller (“rural”) libraries—25,000 as a service area population—my sample still includes nearly 62% smaller libraries, but nearly 78% of U.S. public libraries fall into the smaller categories.

Here's a table that shows how this works out in more detail, using the HAPLR population divisions (and most recent HAPLR numbers) as a basis.

LSA	HAP	LSN	LSN%	L of H	Bias
500,000+	84	62	3%	74%	182%
250-499K	104	72	3%	69%	164%
100-249K	335	214	9%	64%	144%
50-99K	556	244	10%	44%	68%
25-49K	952	325	14%	34%	30%
10-24K	1,764	520	22%	29%	13%
5-9K	1,483	330	14%	22%	-15%
2.5-4.9K	1,310	232	10%	18%	-32%
1-2.4K	1,524	233	10%	15%	-42%
<1000	1,072	174	7%	16%	-38%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,184</b>	<b>2406</b>		<b>26%</b>	
<b>Urban</b>	<b>2,031</b>	<b>917</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>72%</b>
<b>Rural</b>	<b>7,153</b>	<b>1,489</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>-21%</b>
<b>Large</b>	<b>523</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>154%</b>
<b>Medium</b>	<b>3,272</b>	<b>1,089</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>Small</b>	<b>4,317</b>	<b>795</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>-30%</b>

A few notes on that table:

- LSA is the Legal Service Area population. Note that “499K” means “499,999” and “9K” means “9,999,” and so on. “Urban” is the sum of the first five rows—what some reports define as “urban” libraries, those serving at least 25,000 people. “Rural” is the sum of the next five rows—what some reports define as “rural” libraries, those serving fewer than 25,000 people. I've added a different breakdown: Large (libraries serving more than 100,000 people), medium (libraries serving 10,000 to 99,999 people) and small (libraries serving fewer than 10,000 people). I've done that partly because “rural” is such a silly term for libraries such as, say, Darien, Connecticut or Coronado, California.
- The “HAP” column shows the [number of libraries within a population bracket](#) included in the latest [Hennen's American Public Library Ratings](#). This is the *total* number, including those libraries (nearly 20%) that aren't included in HAPLR 2010 ratings because of insufficient IMLS reporting.
- The “LSN” column shows the number of libraries checked for my 25-state survey, and “LSN%” shows percentages of all libraries for each row.
- The final two columns show the relative bias in two different manners. “L of H” shows the percentage of all libraries (as reported in HAPLR) that are within those 25 states. “Bias” is the extent to which a category is overrepresented (positive percentages) or underrepresented (negative percentages)—compared to the 26% of all libraries checked, not the 50% of all states. Using my three-way split for population size, only the smallest libraries (still almost half of all reporting libraries) are underrepresented.

Interpreting these numbers as words, the 25-state sample includes about two-thirds of large libraries (those serving at least 100,000 people), about one-third of medium-sized libraries (those serving 10,000 to 99,999 people) and only about one-sixth of small libraries (those serving fewer than 10,000 people).

In one way, that's nonsense: a fair number of those larger libraries are library systems, some having quite a few (smaller) individual libraries. In another way, it's true: Those library systems *do* in many cases serve as the central websites for all the individual libraries.

## Being Realistic

If I was trying to prove something about public library websites across the nation, this sample would be inadequate—and, frankly, I believe *any* sample short of 100% is likely to be somewhat inadequate. Public libraries are wildly heterogeneous. Even within my biased sample, there are 17 libraries with legal service area populations of fewer than 100 people each (that's one *hundred*, not a mistyped 1,000)—and 19 with LSAs of more than one million people each. Consider the extreme. The largest library system in these 25 states, Los Angeles Public Library, has an LSA of 4.095 million people. To achieve that number of people starting with the smallest library takes 997 libraries—every library serving 10,000 or fewer, and 26 of those serving more than 10,000. If you love classic rock, you'll find it interesting that the cutoff library is Winslow, Arizona.

I'm *not* trying to prove anything about library websites as a whole. I'm trying to look at how a large sampling of public libraries do or don't use some social networks—avoiding the usual tendency to focus on a half dozen or so “star” libraries that seem to crop up so often in the informal literature.

If anything, generalizing from the 25 states studied should tend to overstate the use of social networks, as it's probably true that very small libraries are less likely to make heavy use—or any use—of Twitter or Facebook than very large libraries.

## The Missing 176

Before going on to anecdotal comments on web sites I've seen and mostly liked, it might be worth breaking down the Missing 176. You may not be surprised to learn that *none* of them is in the top three population categories—that is, none serves at least 100,000 people. Two are in the 50,000-99,999 group; seven are in the 25,000-49,999 group. Those nine surprise me, and may reflect sloppy searching on my part. Eighteen libraries where I couldn't find the websites serve 10,000 to 24,999 people; 16 serve 5,000 to 9,999; 23 serve 2,500 to 4,999. Finally, 34 serve 1,000 to 2,499 people—and 76 serve fewer than 1,000 people (including 14 serving fewer than 100).

A pessimist would note that more than 40% of the under-1K libraries and more than 14% of the 1,000-2,499 libraries didn't have websites that I could find. An optimist would note that 60% of the smallest libraries and more than 85% of the next-smallest *did* have findable websites—as did nearly 90% of those serving 2,500 to 4,999 people and more than 95% of any larger category. All things

considered, I believe those are great numbers, and in some states they say a lot about initiatives that spread basic library website templates throughout a state or region, such as the one seemingly named for a *Price is Right* game. (Yes, I do mean [Plinkit](#).)

What you've just seen is an extremely rough-draft version of material that may be part of the book. I won't discuss the *actual* findings—who's using Facebook, who's using Twitter, how libraries are using either or both, how successful they seem to be, and what other libraries might learn from that. (I will discuss those findings in the book, but that's the book.) I can say this: there are *thousands* of libraries—not just small ones—that don't appear to use either one. If someone tells you that every library already has a Facebook page, they're spouting nonsense. That's true even if “every library” really means “every very large library”—no matter how you define “very large.”

## Idle Thoughts on Public Library Websites

If I was considering moving to a new town or city, or if I'd just moved, one thing I'd want to do is check out the public library via its website—and once I had moved, I'd want to use that website. I don't claim to be a typical library user, but I don't think I bring unusual expectations to the game.

### One Simple Example

Let's see what happens with the city we moved to most recently: Livermore, California. If I search “Livermore public library” (without quotes) on Bing, here's what I see (ignoring Bing's usual absurd result size—3,120,000 in this case):

- The very first result is “[Livermore Web – Library](#)” and it's explicitly tagged as an Official site. As it happens, that's the right site—but it's also cheating, as Bing *knows* I'm in Livermore, California (it says so right up in the upper right corner of the page). That result is in a highlighted box, along with a little map and link from [Bing.com/local](#). Things get strange even there: The [Bing local page](#) has a link to the library's website—but it's a *different* URL that happens to be outdated and, after a few seconds, redirects—to yet another URL that auto-redirects to a subsite of Livermore's city site. (Livermore's library has a library-specific URL—but it's just a redirect. That's OK.)
- That website changed dramatically since the last time I used it. It's still clean and usable. It

has the links and search boxes it should have, and each page has the state and zip code (I've seen library pages with no state mentioned).

- Let's say I want to know more about the library. "About the library," with links in several places, takes me to a page with the mission statement, director's name, picture and blog link and links to other places. The first side link is "Hours & Locations" and further down is "Library Statistics," which I'd want to explore as a potential newcomer. Oddly, though, the Statistics link does *not* give me any indication of the collection size. It *does* show key usage statistics for 2009-2010. So I know that 1,106,790 items were checked out during 578,442 visits, and I know that the 87 public computers were used 182,899 times—but I don't know how many books and recordings the library has.
- So as a *potential* user, I see lots of information, but can't readily find out whether there's a substantial bookstock. That's my only gripe about the site.

No problem, right? The very first search result was what I needed, the website makes it easy to search the catalog or to check my own information, and social networks are clearly visible without taking up huge amounts of space (these are *little* icons, just big enough to be clear and useful—and they're working links, which isn't always the case).

Ah, but this is an easy case: "Livermore" is a reasonably distinctive name. Still, what do we see just below that first result?

- The next result is also [Livermore Public Library](#), but this one's in Maine, and it's fair to say that it's a little smaller, given that the *extremely* simple website shows the hours, a total of 10.5 hours per week. During those 10.5 hours (six on Tuesday, 4.5 on Thursday) there are six public computers (provided by Stephen King's family foundation!). The library has more than 12,000 books. It's an all-volunteer library—and yes, the website does include a link to the "never closes!" collection of ebooks and audiobooks. The LSA is 2,204: It's in the second-smallest category of library.
- Then we get a Yelp listing. Really? The Yelp score is 5 out of 5, with 44 reviews (Livermore's library is fairly new)...but, in addition to loads'o'ads, there's *no link* to the LPL website. Can't blame the library for that, but it's certainly bizarre.

- Next—after a set of "Related Searches"—we get a link to the Library Director's Blog, then a link to Livermore's primary website.
- Then there's another ad-supported "we'll make a site for every local place"—this one Livermore's outpost of AOL's Patch. It's just a page for the main library, Livermore Public Library Civic Center, and *does* include the (normal) hours and the collection size. Of course, there are also *lots of ads*. At least the Patch site *does* have an (outdated) link that eventually gets you to the library website,
- Next—and, for many libraries I searched for, this was first in the list—is the [lib-web-cats page](#) from Library Technology Guides, Marshall Breeding's remarkable operation. These pages have uniform layout and information, and it's useful information if possibly outdated (it shows the collection size as 130000 volumes, which is considerably lower than other sources, and shows a circulation level that's more than 10% lower than other reports)—and it *does* include a link to the library's webpage (and another to its online catalog).
- Here's another pair of "local info" ad-supported sites, both from Yahoo! The first one's for Livermore, Iowa and has no useful information other than an address (*lots of ads*); the second is for LPL and, unlike Yelp, *does* have a link to the library's website (along with three ratings, all 5-star, and one "Web review" that's actually a link to Yelp's reviews).
- Next comes a link to [Wikipedia's article on Link+](#), a great networked system that allows Livermore residents (and those who use any of the other Link+ member libraries) to find and check out books from nearly four dozen public and academic libraries in California and Nevada.
- Then we get LPL's Facebook page, followed by the lib-web-cat page for the Iowa Livermore (even smaller than the Maine Livermore: 1,466 residents and no website).
- Next? the "Public Libraries" site—or, rather, [the Livermore page](#) on that site—which has, in addition to relatively fewer ads than other ad-based sites, an *inactive* (text-only) link to an obsolete address for LPL's website and a set of presumably autogenerated basic information, some of it questionable, some outdated, some useful. (The population, annual

visits and hours open are all aged; the number of books and serial volumes is 198,899 this time—but the circulation is *way* low, at under 790,000—and there’s such unusual info as the number of MLS-holding librarians and other full-time employees.) I’ve never been clear as to just who Public-libraries.org really is; it’s an odd set of stuff, not helped by having a textual URL that’s not a link.

- And another “let’s make a site for everything we can!” site: Manta, which *does* have a (slightly obsolete) link, but also loads of ads and the following mysterious “information”:

Livermore Public Library in Livermore, CA is a private company categorized under Public Libraries. Current estimates show this company has an annual revenue of unknown and employs a staff of approximately 20 to 49. Companies like Livermore Public Library usually offer: Marion County Public Library, Baltimore County Public Library, Detroit Public Library, Queens Public Library and Wichita Public Library.

To which one can only say “huh?” LPL is most certainly *not* a private company; the staff number is about right; the last sentence is nothing short of mystifying. (Marion County Public Library? What?) Mostly, the profile seems to be an excuse to show lots of ads.

- It could be worse. The next link takes you to yellowpages.com, where you get 34 results for “Livermore Livermore Public Library,” starting with LPL but continuing with other libraries that just happen to be within 35 miles of Livermore. Clicking on LPL’s specific site yields the address and phone number of a branch that’s mostly closed (not the main library), no web link and no useful information. This is the first site that’s not only not useful, it’s misleading—instead of a main library open seven days a week, it leads you to a branch that, thanks to city budget cuts, is only open one day a week. Gee, thanks.
- The next one is for the library at Lawrence Livermore National Library. Then there’s another autogenerated ad site: Citysearch. This one’s interesting, as it offers LPL’s Twitter and Facebook links near the top of the page—but doesn’t offer a link to LPL’s website at all. Lots of ads, though.
- After that we get lots more. There’s *another* Livermore, this one in Kentucky—and, for reasons unknown, not in my sample (McLean County, in which Livermore is located, isn’t

in the list of reporting counties). There’s a library at a Livermore (California) middle school, and another school library’s page that includes a paragraph on LPL and a link to the Kid’s Place. (Interesting: The school library page *twice* gives this as “Kid’s Place,” but LPL itself *consistently* uses “Kids’ Place.” So much for authority control.)

This is an absurd amount of detail, but it’s just an indicator of what even an “easy” library name has to deal with. Those autogenerated adsites show up high in results, and in most cases they’re of no use whatsoever.

I also tried Google. The results remind me why I used Bing for the first pass of the study: Google’s “helpfulness” gives *way* too much space to subpages of the first result, enough that I don’t actually see any other site until I page down (on a 1200x800 notebook screen). Bing has a compact set of links beneath the first result and shows four more results on that first page. I’d say the results are similar, but that’s not true: Google persists in shoving more and more subpages from the primary LPL website at me throughout the results.

What conclusions do I draw here? There are a *lot* of pages *about* any given public library—but many of them are more concerned with ads than with actually getting you *to* the library. This should not be a surprise.

Thing is, though, even with three or four Livermores, this is an easy case. It could be much worse.

### *Consider Salem*

This time I’ll try Google: “salem public library,” *not* as a phrase. [First link](#) is a silent redirect to [the library’s page](#) on the City of Salem’s website and it’s pretty straightforward—although you get a little into the page before it’s clear *which* Salem this is: Salem, Oregon. [The next one](#) has the state right at the top—Massachusetts in this case—and the next three after that are subsets of the first, apparently, which is a Google tendency I find odd, at best.

If you happen to be looking for Salem, Virginia, you’ll eventually find it—and below that the Ohio version. But that’s not the Salem I’m looking for. I’m looking for Salem, Connecticut—and, in practice, I appended the state code to my Bing searches (e.g., “Salem library ct”—the Public’s usually superfluous). Does that help?

For Google, the first result is for [Salem Free Public Library’s page](#) in the Town of Salem (Connecticut) site, but it’s an odd page: It has library

hours, but otherwise it emphasizes “aboutness”—library board agendas, history, etc.—with actual services well down the page. Google nestles two sub-results beneath that one: a Friends page and one that seems odd initially, given that its heading “Salem Free Public Library” makes it seem more central than the first (“Town of Salem, CT – Salem Free Public Library”). The second turns out to be a summer newsletter issued in PDF form. A third sub-result goes to the library history page. After that, there’s the lib-web-cats page with the proper link.

Then we get a featured result—one with a “Google review” and an insiderpages link—and this one’s strange. The heading is, once again, “Salem Free Public Library,” but the link is to the town’s homepage. Why an indirect link? You got me. There follow two [publiclibraries.com](http://publiclibraries.com) links ([publiclibraries.com](http://publiclibraries.com) is *not* the same as [public-libraries.org](http://public-libraries.org), and only offers lists of libraries and links, but has similarly shadowy provenance) and a variety of other stuff.

If I’d forgotten the CT? I’d eventually find the Connecticut library, well down the page—and, shortly thereafter, pages for the Utah, Missouri and New York Salems.

In this case, however, Bing has a problem, and it’s a problem I’ve seen with Google for some other libraries. That problem is what I’d call fraudulent sites. To wit:

- The first result is the same as for Google: A page on the town’s website.
- The second result has a URL that would lead me to believe that it’s the *real* library website: [www.salem-ct-library.org](http://www.salem-ct-library.org). It’s not. It’s apparently part of “Public Libraries Directory,” and it contains *no* information on Salem, CT’s library. What it does have: Ads for online education. Odd categories that lead to peculiar lists of sites. And this wording, under the heading “Public Libraries”:

An Internet-based information service on Public Library theme, information and links to the public libraries by state or city. Libraries by region, Archives, College and University, Digital, & Government Libraries, National Library, Presidential, Research libraries on the natural and social sciences, history, law, economics, School Library list, Subject Specific Libraries, etc...

Online information about a public library or a public library services.

To which I can only say “Huh?”

Ah, but a bit later—after the lib-web-cats a yellowpages page—is another one that *could* seem like

an official page but is actually “A Connecticut Genweb Page” listing with a few Salem links—except that the link for the public library is to the phony site (the second result), not the real site. (This time, the yellowpages result does, supposedly, have a website link—and, once again, it’s to the phony site.) And here’s a Salem page on [americantowns.com](http://americantowns.com), with a link—oh, look, it’s the [salem-ct-library.org](http://salem-ct-library.org) site again.

Then there’s the [epodunk.com](http://epodunk.com) page for Salem, CT. The first time I clicked “libraries” on the sidebar, I got a popup ad that had nothing to do with libraries or Salem. The second time, I was taken to a link offering a “Profile” with no real information and a link to...well, you can guess.

### Other Cases

Salem, Connecticut is certainly not the only case. My spreadsheet for 2,406 libraries includes at least 20 cases of “multiple different websites.” Consider, for example, Joseph City Library in Joseph, Oregon. The Bing results show a lib-web-cats page first. That page has a website link heading to a [Plinkit library page](#) which, like many Plinkit pages, is somewhat generic but also useful and well organized. The second result is to a page on [Oregon.educationbug.org](http://Oregon.educationbug.org), and once you get through the profusion of irrelevant links, there’s no link to the library website at all. Third is another oddball page, on [userinstinct.com](http://userinstinct.com), with the heading “Joseph City of, Library in Joseph Oregon (or)”—a site that’s pretty obviously autogenerated and offers no useful information or an actual link.

Then you get somewhere...or too many places:

- The City of Joseph, Oregon site leads to [a library page](#) that’s quite different from the Plinkit page and offers no link to that page. The City page does *not* offer a direct search box, unlike the Plinkit page, and has some layout problems (overlapping text) that make it difficult to use.
- Next is “[Joseph Library](#),” a page that’s radically different from either the City page or the Plinkit page, cruder than either and with oddities such as “Up Coming Events” and different hours than the City and Plinkit pages (this site has the library open 12-4 M-F; the others say 12-4 Tue-Sat). This page dates from 1999, has a “Made with Macintosh” logo, and enough errors in its minimal text to make it suspicious at best.
- Then there’s the Joseph City Library page from Online Highways, with so little information as

to be little more than an excuse to display loads of ads—but that one’s fairly obvious.

- And what’s this? It’s labeled as “The Official Joseph Oregon site...” but it’s josephoregon.com, not josephoregon.org. What makes it official? It appears to come from the Chamber of Commerce—and, despite turning up from this search, it has neither any information about the library nor any link to it or to the actual city site.

There’s more, but that’s enough to illustrate the problem. Does Google do better? Not really: It gives two links to josephoregon.com precedence over the city’s .org link. The lib-web-cats page once again shows up first, followed by another lib-web-cats page and the useless education.bug page—but at least the oddball Made with Macintosh page isn’t there. On the other hand, above the Plinkit page is a Google-generated page which has the number of accurate links to the library’s website you should expect by now: *None whatsoever*.

I find the sheer profusion of apparently auto-generated sites at best confusing and at worst misleading. The fact that most of them either have no links to the actual websites or *incorrect* links doesn’t help matters. I’m not sure these are in any way helpful. Citysearch, epodunk, manta, yelp, yellowpages, awesomebusinesspages, myareaguide, corporation-wiki, city-data, ohwy, userinstinct, citytown-info...the list seems endless. Add to that the supposed directories: 50states, publiclibraries.com, public-libraries.org, educationbug, educationhq...

Problems arise when a user can’t locate the official library website among all the crap in search results—and, much as I like lib-web-cats, its tendency to appear *before* actual library websites makes me unhappy. Real problems also arise when it’s just not clear what the official website is—or whether there is such a thing.

### Government Hierarchies

In a fair number of cases, you’re likely to wind up on the library page within a city or county government website, either because that’s the only library website there is or because the government sets things up that way.

If there’s a clear link to the library’s website, prominent on the page, that’s not much of a problem. If the subordinate website is effectively a library-controlled website, with catalog search, user login (for renewals, holds, etc.) and other features typical of libraries but atypical for cities and coun-

ties, it’s also not a problem: Technically, LPIs website is just a part of the city’s web, but it functions as a good library-specific website.

But sometimes there is no such link—and sometimes the library’s only website is clearly controlled by a higher body that isn’t much concerned with library issues. In those cases, you’re likely to get a lot of library history or a lot about library governance, but not much of what you’d want as a potential library user. That’s a shame. I’m not going to name names, here or elsewhere; after all, it’s not always something a library can control.

### Quaint and Stylistic Issues

I’ve gone on *far* too long on this stuff. The book may mention some of the issues in finding Facebook and Twitter accounts from library websites—e.g., cases where there’s no link at all (“find us on Facebook” doesn’t do it, unless that’s a link) and a few cases where the link’s just wrong. If you’re wondering, I found 380 libraries where I couldn’t find a Facebook or Twitter link on the library’s website but did find a Facebook or Twitter account through Bing—and at least half a dozen where there’s a Facebook icon that either isn’t a link at all or is a link that doesn’t work. Out of more than 2,200 websites I actually checked, I suppose that’s not bad—but out of 1,141 Facebook-using libraries, it’s more than a 33% problem rate. (In some cases, the missing link may be deliberate: The Facebook page shows no updates for quite a few months.)

I do find some sites a little quaint. Visible counters? In 2011? Animated GIFs? Really?

Multicolored text? Sure, on a kids’ page. On a library’s home page?

Then there’s the killer—one I’ve seen on library websites and city websites, although less frequently now than a few years ago. To wit: Do your pages show *what state the library is in*? There are a lot fewer unique city and county names than you’d expect—look at the number of cities named Livermore, not to mention Salem, Johnson County, Lincoln or the like. For Lincoln, you have your choice of [www.lincolnlibrary.com](http://www.lincolnlibrary.com), [www.lincolnlibraries.org](http://www.lincolnlibraries.org), [lincolnpl.org](http://lincolnpl.org), [libraryatlincoln.org](http://libraryatlincoln.org), [lincolnpubliclibrary.org](http://lincolnpubliclibrary.org), [www.lincolnlibrary.info](http://www.lincolnlibrary.info), [www.lincoln.lib.nh.us](http://www.lincoln.lib.nh.us), and [www.lincoln.library.on.ca](http://www.lincoln.library.on.ca). They’re all legitimate public library websites, for Lincoln in Rhode Island, Nebraska, Massachusetts, California, Illinois, Illinois *again* (this time Springfield—the first one doesn’t have a city name on the site itself but says “of Lincoln, Illinois” in the site identification), New

Hampshire and Beamsville and Vineland in Ontario, Canada. If you explore the results further, there's also a page for the one in Lincoln, Alabama—and there may be others. Some of these sites show the state at the top of the page; at least one or two don't show it until the bottom of the page.

There's my grumble for this issue. It's *much* longer than I'd planned (I was aiming for about 3,000 words, and this is roughly 6,000 so far), but I think the details are useful. Now, let's look at a few other commentaries on libraries, librarians and the web and social networks.

## Making it Work: Websites and Social Networks

About the only things these diverse items have in common are that they relate to libraries or librarians, they relate to websites and social networks (but not blogging—that's a separate cluster), and I thought them interesting enough to be worth tagging. As usual, they're in chronological order.

### *Why We Should Adopt ALAConnect*

That's not the full title of Emily Ford's [May 13, 2009 essay](#) at *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*; it continues "A brief review and rumination on ALA's new online community." ALAConnect was indeed new at that point, and although Ford started out pessimistic, she found herself hoping

that ALAConnect will be able to reach individuals who haven't been able to attend conferences and engage with their colleagues about ALA-centric issues. If ALAConnect can draw this constituency to use it, then the tool might mean some real changes for ALA.

She points out that even the early version provided some group working tools that should be helpful for ALA committees working "virtually." She also found usability problems—most of which she blames on Drupal. The first one struck me as interesting, maybe because it's something I wouldn't plan on doing in ALAConnect (I've been a user almost since its inception, but rarely visit it):

One of the first things I attempted to do in ALAConnect was build my social network. I quickly discovered that it takes too many clicks to add a new friend. After you have found a friend to add and successfully add that friend, the system returns you to your profile instead of the "My Network" page.

I'm not an "online networking junkie" (Ford's self-description), but I can't see doing this—although maybe that's me. Ford says privacy is also an issue:

There are some pretty robust features for privacy in ALAConnect, but it's hard to figure out what's what without doing your research. You can choose to keep your membership in communities private, but your official ALA work will display to members.

That last clause suggests a tension between privacy and ALA's sunshine laws. Except for awards and scholarship committees (and a very few other temporary exceptions), ALA committees are *required* to act in public; "your official ALA work" *should* display to members. (You can't be on an ALA committee and have that membership be private in any case.)

Ford's next privacy complaint strikes me as "Everybody *should* work the way I do" in nature. First, she's astonished that her phone number shows up on her profile—and then finds that it only displays to people she identifies as contacts. She says, though:

This overlooks two simple questions: Who is going to call me when they could shoot me an email, and why was this piece of data even imported into ALAConnect?

My answer to the first: Because *sometimes the phone works better*, at least for some people. The second follows from the first. (Ford swipes at phone numbers twice: "Why we need a phone number to display in an online social networking tool is beyond me." See my answer above—and note that ALAConnect is an *online community* tool, not necessarily a "social networking tool.")

The next part's interesting: Ford's upset that she can't mention her multiple Masters and include all of her schooling—and, *in an ALA community*, she wants to be able to connect with alums of her college, "which seems to be a logical way to network." If ALAConnect is The Only Social Network Librarians Use, that's true enough—but as part of an official ALA community? Really? She notes a Facebook group that provides that functionality; maybe Facebook is the place for it. She discusses how ALAConnect should connect with all the other social networks—and here Ford notes what seems to be missing elsewhere:

The problem here is that ALAConnect is not supposed to be a social networking site. Rather, it is intended to be a professional networking site. This is an important distinction to note, but I wonder if it is a distinction that users will make.

It is an important distinction. LinkedIn isn't MySpace with a coat & tie, and ALAConnect shouldn't be either.

Then comes "The Social Context."



The question is: for ALA members who feel disenfranchised and disenchanted, can ALAConnect be a democratizing factor? Can a social movement form in this virtual space to give ALA members what they need from the organization? I think it's possible, but whether this happens will be determined by the system's users.

Ford discusses ALA's structure (which she finds "scary, unwieldy, and seemingly unnavigable") and recognizes that ALAConnect *must* work with that structure—but sees a tension between the ALA ties and networking.

Her verdict?

Despite some of the criticisms I've discussed in this article, I think it is a tremendous resource with great potential. Content, including communities and discussions, can be user-generated. Structures and conversations can center around an issue, not around a division, something that ALA desperately needs in order to be able to involve a larger community, to make the ALA structure more open, and to make the association's work more relevant to today's librarians. The fact that the system is part of the ALA structure may dissuade some users, but there is a growing online community of non-ALA members who have created ALAConnect accounts and are using the resource.

ALAConnect offers everyone in libraryland (not just ALA members) a way to get involved in professional discourse, to engage in professional networking, and to create their own professional communities online. What we need to do is to join ALAConnect en masse, create groups, engage in communities, and make ALA what we need it to be. ALAConnect is just a starting point, but I honestly think that if we start there, the sky is the limit. It's up to us to make sure we use the system in a way that is meaningful to us.

The third sentence above makes interesting political assumptions about ALA and "today's librarians," but since I'm not one of the latter I won't comment. Since I *never* saw ALAConnect as a replacement for, say, FriendFeed's LSW room or the social networks I am involved with, I'd come at this very differently: Does ALAConnect work to further ALA goals?

There are 16 comments. I think I mostly agree with Steve Lawson's second paragraph:

From the review, I get the impression that the site mostly works, but is kind of clunky, confusing, and duplicates what we can find in other sites. But the last paragraph encourages us to all go adopt it right away. Happily, I don't think that will happen. I'd prefer to see our communities grow more organically, finding the channels and tools that suit them on their own, rather than depending on ALA to

**deliver everything.** I can understand why ALA offers more services and functions to members than non-members, but that simple fact will keep most non-members (such as myself) from being very excited about trying to build communities on ALA's turf. [Emphasis added.]

Jenny Levine offers some detailed responses, and clearly took Ford's ideas to heart. I second this:

I'm not convinced that members want their social lives mashed up with their professional ones. For example, if we import Facebook info into Connect, I don't think we can offer a granular method for displaying information only from your "professional" groups or only your "safe" status updates. If we were to display that complaint you posted about work, a colleague, or your affiliation with the "I Love Popcorn" group on your Connect profile, how are you going to feel when your colleagues see that on your professional presence?

I just checked in at ALAConnect (which does now have a "Classmates" tab). I continue to find it workable as a way to discuss things within and around ALA groups—and neither compelling nor necessary as a replacement for actual social networks.

*Why I'm over people Twittering Conferences, Meetings*  
The first paragraph of [this June 11, 2009 post](#) by Bobbi L. Newman at *Librarian by Day* completes the title: "and anywhere else two Twitter users happen to run into each other." Although I may be misreading it slightly, I'm fascinated—not only by what Newman's saying but also by the fact that Newman, who I regard as more connected than most, is saying it. (Am I wrong to regard her as highly networked? The first thing in the rightmost column of her blog is "Find me on" followed by *seven links*, five others in addition to Twitter and Facebook.)

It seems like a day doesn't go by without signing into my Twitter account to see a stream of tweets from someone going by with a #hashtag I don't recognize. I'm not talking about a couple of tweets, I mean the full-on stream. I'm begging you, please stop!

I'm all for the idea of sending a Tweet when you hear something remarkable, moving, or innovative, but based on the number of Tweets I see flying by every other sentence is worth exclaiming over, somehow I doubt this.

What she sees happening with these tweets is similar to what I've called liveblogging (except there, you get all the disjointed sentences in one swell foop at the end of the session), and I've certainly seen it on Twitter and elsewhere. As she says, "too many people are using Twitter as their personal note taking system. Get a notebook, a netbook, or a pen and

paper, whatever, just stop Tweeting!” I’d go one step further: If you’re going to report on a presentation, *report* on it—tell us what it was about and what you got from it—don’t just string together sentences and immediate impressions.

The chances of this happening? Hell ain’t quite *that* frozen over just yet.

Newman provides seven detailed points of what it means when you’re live-tweeting a session. I’m tempted to quote the paragraphs in full (but since this publication doesn’t use Creative Commons’ Same-As attribute, I’d technically be violating Newman’s license), but here are the key points with my paraphrases in [brackets]. If you’re Twittering:

- You’re not paying attention [She does say “multitasking is a myth”]
- You’re not contributing
- You’re crying wolf [Too many tweets dilute the key points]
- Someone else is probably saying the same thing [Boy, have I seen *that* with hashtags]
- You’re losing your followers [They may not unfollow, but they’re not paying attention]
- You’re making it hard for people to find the info later.
- You’re not blogging. “If I want real information about a session I missed I’d so much rather find a blog post.”

She has a suggestion for those who can’t resist tweeting sessions prodigiously: Set up a separate account strictly for that purpose. She adds a comment about backchannel conversations, putting it a little more bluntly than I have: “Aren’t they really just the equivalent of two people talking to each other in the back of the class? It might go unnoticed in a large audience, but in a small group it’s just rude.”

The first commenter disagrees—but agrees that it makes sense to set up a separate account for this sort of tweeting. Lori Reed *partly* agrees and adds her own pet peeve: People whose tweets automatically show up as Facebook status updates. Kathryn Greenhill, not surprisingly, says there’s no right way to use Twitter—she *loves* getting floods of tweets. So do some others. Indeed, I see more disagreement than agreement. Not that everybody disagrees. Terry Doherty mentions “respect for the speaker” (what a quaint notion!) and—two years later—Newman still stands by her original post. (I really do find it hard to deal with one expressed notion: There’s no time to read blogs with well-formulated posts about sessions—but there’s *plenty* of time to cope with Twitter. *Really?* I can keep up with >400 blogs with no

trouble at all; I’ve long since given up on reading everything in my modest Twitter stream, one where I’m only following 52 people.)

I guess my comments are that *of course* there’s no rulebook for Twitter (just as blogs are *and should be* whatever bloggers want them to be)—but also that livetweeting is even worse than liveblogging at losing the import of a conference session or speech in the minutiae of what’s being said each minute.

*An identity incompletely centered...*

Still from 2009, [this time June 14, 2009](#), Lorcan Dempsey posts at his eponymous blog. Around that time, Facebook started allowing people and organizations to claim Facebook URLs—e.g., his own [www.facebook.com/lorcand](http://www.facebook.com/lorcand). He uses “lorcand” on Twitter as well.

I decided to consolidate on lorcand a little while ago, when I switched from the more opaque **lisd** on Twitter. Of course, this was late in my online life, meaning that - as most others do - I have a fractured online identity: it is pretty decentralized. I feel that I ought to more actively adopt some centering strategies (see below) but it never gets to the top of the list.

Dempsey quotes Andy Powell on his own “fractured” network identity and the desire to consolidate network presences, and offers some reactions. He notes, “It seems clear that managing our network presences and the relationships between them is becoming of more interest” and finds that he’s becoming more conscious of “signing” his network presences consistently (or deliberately not doing so).

To take an example close to home, I wrote some longish reviews on items in Worldcat; recently, I realised that I would like the system to be able to support in some way my assertion that I was their author, and now it does by linking to a profile page. I have tended to use lisd as a handle in a variety of places. Now, I would probably more consistently use something like LorcanDempsey where I was more concerned about ‘signature’, although I am quite attached to lisd ;-)

Here’s an interesting point, especially given the second part of the essay you’re currently reading:

Of course, Google is a strong bottom-up centering service (see Tony Hirst’s interesting [suggestion](#) that an institution’s de facto home page is the first page of Google results in a search for that institution). My first-page Google results tend to be dominated by this blog, but there are also current and previous work pages, some articles come and go, and more recently Wikipedia and Facebook make a showing. None of these is at a domain name controlled by

me. This blog was established as an internal OCLC communications tool for a year before it was externalised so it is 'located' at OCLC (in several ways). Now, I am sure that it gets a ranking 'lift' from the OCLC domain name, but it also means that I cannot bring it with me as it now stands if I ever leave. In a sense, I lose some of that network capital. Of course this is quite reasonable from another view, but it does raise interestingly the balance between individual and institution.

If a public library's home page is not on the first page of Google or Bing results—and, for that matter, if that's true for me as well—we're in a whole heap of trouble here. (Turns out that's not true for me—I'm happy enough with the first 15 or 20 results from my name as a phrase on either service, but most public libraries shouldn't be.) And, given Dempsey's next note about name uniqueness, I'm especially happy that the *first* result for my name, my own web page, shows up in search engine summaries as the disambiguation paragraph distinguishing me from the ornithologist. Finally:

Now, I know that there are various initiatives underway which may make our identities more portable. I assume - hope - that we will end up with the ability to port our identities flexibly, but that we also retain the ability to support decentralised identities which may not know very much, or anything, about each other ;-)

So do I—but I'm also aware that Google is particularly interested in us having firm, centralized, *Googleized* identities, ones that Google and other Lords of the Universe can verify. In which case, to be sure, I'm Walter C. Crawford, not Walt Crawford (and the ornithologist is also Walter C. Crawford, so that ain't gonna help).

Jonathan Rochkind's comment is too good not to quote in full:

A contrasting theme might be times when some people WANT to keep their identity split in several parts, but the increasingly searchable and interconnected internet makes that difficult.

Several people who work in academia have told me (and I feel to some extent myself) that they have trouble with facebook precisely because it brings together their work colleagues and non-work friends in one community/identity they'd prefer to keep separated. And, from a different end, I've heard of students being in fact disconcerted to find professors and librarians on facebook, because facebook is for social life, not school. And, likewise, I've heard from professor friends that they don't like it when their students contact them on facebook,

because the professors view facebook as for social life not work too!

Hmm. I don't remember ever explicitly claiming specific URLs for either Twitter or Facebook—and I find that my Facebook URL uses a form of my name that, while certainly good enough, isn't my common "waltcrawford" online identity: walt.crawford. And yes, I have been pretty consistent about using waltcrawford, although waltc still shows up here and there.

### *Community and archival*

This post, by Dorothea Salo [on August 11, 2009](#), while *The Book of Trogoon* was still an active blog on ScienceBlogs, is interesting in several ways—both for what it says and for what has and hasn't happened since then. Well, and for where it appears: in a blog that's no longer there, on a blog network that's since been sold to a publisher who's insisting on a "real names" rule that may be driving out even more bloggers.

Salo's talking about Friendfeed—which she treats as essentially defunct, since by August 2009 it had been purchased by Facebook. She liked being able to listen in to portions of the scientific community, as do (not "did") I. She liked the Library Society of the World on FriendFeed—and so do I. She was pretty convinced that FriendFeed was doomed:

The writing is on the wall for FriendFeed; it'll limp along for a bit and then be shut down. Sic transit communitas mundi.

That might be true, but "a bit" has turned out to be at least more than two years—which, in social networking or web terms, is a pretty damn long bit. To date: Not one sign that Facebook plans to shut down FriendFeed. It's not being actively developed or promoted; to some of us, that's a good thing, since the modest size makes FriendFeed more manageable.

The direct point of the post? Some of the scientists think that FriendFeed should have tools to allow users to archive posts and comments, and even argue there should be "a public archive made of the complete public timeline." Cameron Neylon asserted "There is gold in there for future sociologists (they just haven't realised it yet). For the rest of the research community here there is immense value tied up in here which we would like to continue to get at in the future." Salo's not so sure.

I want to draw a distinction between personal value, community value, and archival value. Items of considerable personal value may have limited or no

community value. Items of considerable personal or community value may have limited archival value—archival space and attention are not infinite (and growing more finite by the day). Archival value is often hugely overestimated...

So where is FriendFeed on this scale? For me personally, the value of the content I have put there is so low that I'm not planning to archive it. (I have a somewhat *laissez-faire* attitude toward life-archiving anyway; I have no ambition to appear in history books.) Likewise, to me, the value of the community content. The community interaction has been hugely valuable to me, and I hope it can survive FriendFeed's demise, but the frozen remains of that interaction? Limited if any value (again, to me; I don't argue with Cameron's or anyone else's value perceptions).

If we are to estimate the archival value of FriendFeed interactions, I think we need to ask: how much research work is happening here that happens nowhere else and that can inform further research work? The second criterion is crucial. If it doesn't create additional knowledge, it's not worth archiving. Harsh... but archival space and attention are not infinite.

Sorry, sociologists and historians of science: I don't think FriendFeed makes the cut. A lot of social software doesn't, especially considering the difficulty of archiving it at all. Archival is not typically a desideratum of these systems (and I frankly maintain that Facebook's stickiness regarding personal information is one reason I left it after zeroing out my profile), so it takes real effort to save anything.

Blogs and wikis may well make the cut—not en masse, to be sure, but on an individual basis. I've argued before and doubtless will again that libraries need to look seriously at their faculty's blogs, hosted in institution-space or no. The same questions as above are important. If it helps, think of blogs as gray literature, much of which absolutely has archival value.

This is relevant and important even if FriendFeed survives for another few years or decades...because FriendFeed isn't really the point. Some gray literature does have archival value; in other cases, it depends on your definition of "archival" and "value." (On the gripping hand, Jason Scott and his merry band are doing some remarkable things, and disk space really is getting awfully damn cheap.)

*Wednesday, feeling sort of old, but overly paranoid/panic-y*

That's Christina Pikas writing [on August 12, 2009](#) at *Christina's LIS Rant*—at that time, *also* on ScienceBlogs—and the title is "an imitation" of a post I'd

written on August 10, 2009. (The link in Christina's post yields a 404 because, after I moved back from ScienceBlogs to my own domain, the posts *all* disappeared. You'll find "Monday, old and insufficiently paranoid" [here](#), if you're interested. Excuse the formatting: That's what happens when you import from TypePad to WordPress.) We were both responding to Facebook's acquisition of FriendFeed. I'd seen a bunch of "We're all doomed!" posts, and I wasn't buying it.

Christina isn't necessarily joining in the doom-cryers; the bulk of the brief post is her assessment of FriendFeed itself:

I love friendfeed. It's really the porous boundaries between the groups that really does it. You get to know people because things they share/post are "liked" by people you know and trust. I've been introduced to tons of librarians and scientists I would never have met in other settings. A few scientists and I also wrote an abstract for a paper about how friendfeed works - each of us was from a different country! Blogs that never get any comments are "liked" 20 times and have 62 comments in friendfeed for multiple posts. It somehow gets over the commenting barrier. THIS is more like what people were talking about 5 years ago with aggregating conversations from across the web.

I don't disagree; LSW on FriendFeed is probably my most worthwhile social networking space.

Looking at Diigo, I find that I have half a dozen items tagged "sn-friendfeed." That's not enough for an article, but maybe I should note a few of those here. One, by MG Siegler [on October 17, 2009](#) at *techcrunch*, tells me that "FriendFeed has turned into a ghost town." There's a lot more to it, but that's the gist—and I don't buy it. Maybe it's become a ghost town for SEOs: Can't say that I mind. Sure, Robert Scoble gave up on it: Such a shame.

Maybe it really is that the social network hipsters were no longer happy. Thus Louis Gray [on February 9, 2010](#) on "How Google Buzz Validates but Marginalizes FriendFeed." That's right: Since Google Buzz was *inevitably* a huge success, there's no doubt about Gray's conclusion: "You could be using FriendFeed in the future, but it will be called Buzz." (Surely you're using Google Buzz and have been since early 2010. Aren't you? Hey, it's Google: how could it fail?) Or, hey, you could bring that post forward to [July 10, 2011](#), change "Buzz" to "+" and give it to another author, Dare Obasanjo: "Google+ is the new FriendFeed." Or is Google+ the new Google Buzz? End of digression; also end of

that Diigo cluster. Now, back to making it work. Apparently I just wasn't tagging MiW stuff the same way in 2010, but I do have one item from that year:

*IOLUG speaker's notes on online identity*

That's Jenica Rogers [on January 5, 2010](#) at *Attempting Elegance*. It's her notes from a presentation she did on online identity. Rogers is strong on maintaining a personal and professional online identity, and notes that she wouldn't have been speaking at IOLUG without that identity.

As a result of my own experiences, I think that having an online identity, if you are an information professional, is an incredibly worthwhile endeavor. We are responsible for our own development as professionals, and as a profession, and the communities of practice I've found online are astonishingly rich and incredibly beneficial.

She shows how you'd find out about her through Google results. It's a discussion worth reading (and following online—"Jenica Rogers" is a reasonably distinctive name, although it's worth noting, if you use Bing, that the librarian at SUNY Potsdam is *not* a track & field person currently in the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and that Jenica's former hyphenated married name may always be with her online).

Take as a given that you probably do want an online presence. Here's a great paragraph:

Parts of you the person will leak into your online identity, even if you try to stay professional. And if you try to stay personal, the professional will leak in, too. Why? Because we are all whole people, not just pieces of ourselves, and we bleed across boundaries. You talk to your family about work, and you talk at work about your family; online life is no different. And some of our online tools – notably Facebook – actively promote that blurring of lines. Facebook makes you WORK at keeping people separate. Facebook's privacy controls are complex and hidden and change constantly. Facebook is becoming ubiquitous, and setting itself up as a conduit, a funnel, that gathers all your information from around the web and feeds it into your profile page, and so the President of my college, my 19 yr old cousin in Italy, my college roommate, and my Library Technology Coordinator all have access to a baffling array of information about me.

I'm not going to quote or dissect the whole presentation; go read the post yourself, although I'm sure the actual speech was more fun. Consider, though, these three paragraphs from "the ugly" section of online presence:

I was told, for example, by another library director, that I would never have a leadership position in an

academic library if I continued blogging and sharing so much of my true thoughts about the profession and our daily work, and about my own daily life online. He seemed terribly threatened by the idea that librarians in leadership positions would speak openly about their thoughts; he seemed to feel that it would threaten the power structure, challenge the status quo, and generally leave a leader vulnerable to ... something.

That was three years ago. I'm proud to have proven that director wrong, because I think transparency and communication are the cornerstone of a strong information exchange, and I'm proud to continue contributing to that. But I did make changes to how I approached my online identity after the conversation because it was clear that the leadership of the profession was not ready for what I wanted to share. And it was clear to me that I was going to have to wait. I dug in my heels, made changes I wasn't happy with, and said to myself, "I can wait this out." Someday, one of three things will happen: 1, all of those cranky old bastards will retire. 2, I will outgrow my youthful rebellion, or 3, the internet will change dramatically and rapidly and my stand on this issue will become irrelevant.

I suspect answer number 3.

Rogers, with whom I frequently agree and frequently argue, makes a number of good points about the lessons she's learned and that others should learned. I leave most of them to you, but I think she's got one that needs to be repeated, even if it's not universally applicable: As a profession, librarians aren't really ready for online identities—and need to be.

Great post, with lots of stuff I haven't mentioned. I'm in some ways a reluctant online participant, and I'm nearly twice Rogers' age, but I agree that most people really do need to have online identities—and to think about what those identities are.

[W]e're smart. We're thoughtful. We can each find a way to have an authentic online presence we're comfortable with, and start to integrate ourselves into the new information landscape around us. Sure, it's scary, and weird, and a bit challenging, and sort of alienating.

But do it anyway. The view from the top is amazing.

Sounds about right.

*Social Networking Best Practices*

This post is from "Miss Information" and appeared [on March 14, 2011](#) at *Closed Stacks*. After an introduction from the days when few libraries were involved with social networks, we get this paragraph—which begins with a *falsehood*, at least

unless this person means “academic libraries” when she says “libraries”:

Just a few years later, almost all libraries have Facebook pages, and we are figuring out as a profession just how we'd like to use them. Are we engaging with our community on these pages, asking for feedback? Are we promoting programs? What exactly are these pages for?

I am nearly certain that most public libraries do *not* have active Facebook pages. I am pretty nearly certain that there's no simple answer to that last question. The post has six numbered paragraphs. I'll quote the boldface portion for each one, with [summaries] if I think they're useful:

- **Have a personality.** [Don't just post events; post what might be interesting.]
- **Ask questions, interact.**
- **Act like a person.** [She seems to be saying that *the library*—which is to say, whoever controls the library's Facebook page—should respond to Facebook friends' updates and comments *as the library*. Maybe.]
- **Make your followers feel like the in-crowd.** [Send Facebook information before you share it elsewhere. Really?]
- **Keep an eye on what the most people interact with.** [“Keep doing what works.”]
- **Expand.** [Facebook's not enough—she now has “a Foursquare, a Gowalla, a newspaper column, a local cable television show...”]

I wonder about a couple of these, but I haven't really started going through several hundred samples of tweets and updates yet. And, in one of those blog mysteries, there are “two responses,” of which one appears to exist.

*Which social network should I use as a librarian?*

Phil Bradley asks this provocative question in a piece that [appeared some time recently](#) on *Phil Bradley's website*. (I tagged it on August 23, 2011; I can't find a datestamp on the article itself.) I'm nervous about discussing Bradley pieces—we seem to misunderstand one another in some fundamental way, or maybe it's just that I shouldn't be critiquing someone of Bradley's status—but this is a good piece, even if it does wholly ignore one social network that more than 700 librarians find worthwhile.

He was inspired to write the article by Google+:

Sure, it was new and exciting, so we all signed up for it because, well, it's Google's latest attempt at social networking, so we all had to take a look. What most of us did was then write an initial post something along the lines of 'OK, yet another social

network to look at', with an existing element of despair. Unlike Twitter, where many people's first tweet would be something like 'I'm trying out Twitter', with an overtone of curiosity and interest. What we then found were all of our friends who would update their Facebook or Twitter status with 'I'm trying out Google+'. At some point something has to give, doesn't it. So let's start by looking at the major networks, and seeing just how useful they are, and what you use them for, before trying to work out how to dump one or more of them, or at least use them differently!

He discusses Twitter for news, LinkedIn for jobs “and discussions” and Facebook for, well, Facebook. They're all good, down-to-earth, funny discussions; you'll find them worth reading, even if you don't always agree with Bradley. Then there's “Google+ the game changer”—“the big stick that's stirring everything and everyone up.” He mentions others, but mostly just Flickr and a couple of specialty networks.

Ah, but then comes the real payoff:

It's really easy to base your decision entirely on your personal interests. The simple answer is just to say 'Facebook for friends, LinkedIn for professional discussions, Twitter for news and Google+ because errr, it's Google. It's a tempting thought, isn't it. Quick and easy decision made then - delete a few people here, add a few people there and you're done. Or, if you want to get really serious, don't bother with Google+ until everyone else uses because until everyone else uses it there's no point in changing is there?

The problem is that there's two ways of using social media, when you start to think about it. If all that you're interested in personal stuff, go right ahead and make a choice such as the one above. However, as librarians, we should have an interest that transcends that. We need to look at social networks in rather different ways, and as such, we need to be more closely involved with them than your average (because librarians are never average!) web user. Over the page I'll go into rather more detail.

That second page discusses social networks as search resources and continues from there—this is an extended article. I don't think I need to comment on the second page; it's worth reading and thinking about. The third page is on “solving the problem” of network overload.

Portions of Bradley's conclusions:

So, at long last I've reached what I regard as a good answer for the question 'which social network should I use?' You should use all of them - or at least as many of them as you have found valuable. Make use of any bookmarklets to add pages that you find useful, and to

alert your followers, groups, circles or what have you. Monitor the activity from arms length whenever possible, and only go to the resource(s) when there's an absolute need. Try and incorporate everything into a single tool if possible, or failing that, make sure that what you add into one resource can be quickly transported across to another.

I'm sorry to add this last section in, but I think it's important that I do. Proactive use of social media networks is not a nice add-on, or a thing to spare a few minutes on a week. You can get away without a media presence for only so long and those days are fast becoming numbered. The more you can like, +1, and the more people you can follow, have following you, and add to networks spread across resources such as Delicious or Slideshare, the more authority you will have. This will benefit you, your organisation and your users...

The last portion, and much of what precedes it and argues the need for (all?) librarians to be recognized as authority figures in online communities, is one of those areas where my worldview is simply different—and Bradley may well be right. Go read the article; make up your own mind. And remember that FriendFeed really hasn't disappeared yet, although it's becoming invisible to the Gurus of Social Media like Robert Scoble and Friends.

### *The changing professional conversation*

If I have qualms about including Phil Bradley's excellent thoughts in one of these essays (not because of what he's saying but because of our apparent disagreements), I have *no* qualms about almost winding up this essay with Meredith Farkas—now on the Left Coast and still one of the most thoughtful, delightful and level-headed librarians on the online scene. This piece appeared [August 23, 2011](#) at *Information Wants To Be Free*.

Farkas is on Twitter a *lot* more than I am: “librarianmer” has 2,291 followers, follows 376 people (what a great ratio!) and, as of this writing, has 4,700 tweets. She has found Twitter useful professionally and personally: “In spite of what people might say about its value, I have gotten a lot out of Twitter professionally.”

But if I try to recall those conversations, that great piece of advice, or that link to that article that someone posted to Twitter maybe a year ago, I usually find myself at a dead-end. While Twitter can be a great medium for having conversations with many, many knowledgeable and interesting people, I am frustrated by the ephemeral nature of those conversations. I was working on creating slides for a presentation yesterday, and I remembered that a

friend had posted a link on Twitter to an infographic that would have been really useful to me, but it was a long time ago and would have been nearly impossible to find. I ended up searching Google for over 20 minutes before I finally put in the right keywords and found a blog post that included the link I was looking for.

Sure, there are workarounds, but it's not easy...and, as Farkas says, maybe it's OK that “Twitter mimics the real world, where we don't record our conversations and have to rely on our memory to recall what was said.”

But it's not just Twitter. Very few of us are only having conversations in one space. Twitter. FriendFeed. Google Plus. Facebook. I have friends in all of those and while some are friends in all of those spaces, many of them I can only interact with in one of them. I have given up on FriendFeed because I just don't have the time (and I never got into Google Plus), but I know I am missing meaningful interactions with friends I care deeply about. But who can be everywhere? Is there anyone who can have meaningful interactions with their networks in all of those spaces? I find that difficult to imagine. And who wants to have to go to four different places to have conversations? Do you post the same things to all of them?

It's a shame that Farkas has dropped FriendFeed. I do see her point, however, and she cites another person who's troubled by the dispersal of online conversation.

I've been blogging for nearly seven years now and my blog is an amazing record of my changing interests, views and more. It's also a great record — through comments and trackbacks — of the conversations I've had and that others have had about my ideas. You can really get a sense of the tenor of conversations around certain topics in the past by looking at my blog comments. Though there are certainly things I'd like to delete from that history, it does represent me at a specific time in my professional and personal development and I appreciate having that window into the “me” of two, four, or six years ago. And how many times have I gone back to a post of mine it for ideas for an article or a presentation?

Not that blogging isn't distributed, but it's at least mostly findable. “With comments and trackbacks, it still is relatively easy to follow the thread of a conversation that happened many years ago across the blogosphere. This is something we lost when we jumped into the stream. And maybe that's ok most of the time, but there are moments when we might like a record of those conversations; where what we

feel we (or others) are writing about or linking to is significant.”

Farkas has found blog posts quoted in peer-reviewed articles; I think I have also, although I’m nowhere near as quotable as Farkas. That’s important to her as a tenure-track librarian; I think blog posts *do* play a significant role in the profession’s development. Can streaming conversations in various social networks do as well?

I know it’s futile to argue for a return to blogging as the primary means of professional conversation in social media. But I think it’s valuable to consider what we lose by replacing blogging with stream-based social media (not supplementing, but replacing). A loss of control, of history, of scholarly relevance and perhaps of deeper and more meaningful discussions.... There are things I post to Twitter that I think others might like to know about that I don’t feel merit an entire blog post. Twitter has a lot of advantages over blogs for a lot of things. But it is not an adequate replacement for the kind of thoughtful conversations one can have via blogs. There were a lot of blogs that I loved years ago that have become nearly (or truly) defunct as their authors have moved to Twitter or FriendFeed to have the majority of their professional conversations. I know it’s just the way things go, but I can’t help but feel some disappointment that it’s the way things are going.

As someone looking to build or maintain a coherent presence online, I think there is still value to carving out one’s own space on the Web, rather than just contributing ephemeral insights through microblogging. There’s a place for both, but, for me, at least, I want to find a way to centralize and control my contribution to the profession. And I’m just not sure how to do that with what I write in “the streams.”

I’d like to think it isn’t either/or, but I *know* some bloggers have largely abandoned their blogs in favor of networks. Are these the same bloggers who would have faded away in any case? I don’t know. Am I one of them? Well, I certainly appear a lot more frequently on FriendFeed than I do at *Walt at Random*...

### *In which I act like I have it all figured out*

If some wording at the start of the previous section—“I have no qualms about almost winding it up...”—strikes you as odd, that’s because the “almost” wasn’t there: When I first wrote this essay, Farkas’ piece was the last one discussed. Then Steve Lawson had the audacity to post an essay [on August 30, 2011](#) at *See Also...*, and it’s good enough that I couldn’t just ignore it. Lawson notes Farkas’ post and a couple of others and summarizes:

The upshot...is that the authors feel pulled in many different directions by all the social media sites where they are active. They feel it on the writer’s side, where they feel a lack of control over things they write and then post on sites that they don’t own...

Lawson finds that he’s less worried than he used to be about lack of control and about finding and re-locating interesting stuff you read, and although he’s not usually in the advice business, he makes an exception: “So here’s what I do, or what I would do if I were still more worried about this problem of fragmentation—your mileage may vary.”

His five steps—the italicized lead sentences and my [paraphrases] of his expansion:

- Blog more. [If you have something interesting to say, blog it—don’t just tweet. “Let Twitter or Google+ or whatever be your first draft of your cool idea and the blog post be the second draft.”]
- Blog less. [Edit your posts, cutting 25% to 75% of the words.]
- Ignore almost everything. [He uses FriendFeed and subscribes to about 20 blogs—“And I mostly ignore everything else.” But read the whole comment.]
- Keep everything else in one place forever. [He used to use del.icio.us and now uses Evernote. “You don’t have to ever look at most of those notes or links ever again. Don’t groom your folksonomy, don’t spend a moment wondering if you should keep a link or cull it. Keep it. Back it up. Space is cheap.” I use Diigo, and I tend to agree.]
- Don’t delete your accounts. “Just trust me on this one. It’s more trouble than it’s worth.”

There are no comments on the post. It’s generally good advice. I’m a disaster on his second point, which doesn’t mean it’s wrong—but I’m getting to appreciate the fifth one. I don’t go to LinkedIn hardly ever, but my account’s still open. If I stopped going to Google+, I’d leave the account...and so on.

## Conclusions

Grand conclusions? I don’t have any, although I suppose you could take these as points worth noting:

- I don’t know if it’s *mandatory* for a serious library professional to be active on one or more social networks, but it’s certainly getting there—and if you’re not already retired, I’d



say it's silly and counterproductive to avoid them entirely.

- **It. Is. Simply. Not. True.** that all libraries or “almost all” libraries are on Facebook. Period. Full stop. False. I doubt that it will *ever* be true; there are just too many libraries, here and elsewhere, that barely have the resources to stay open a few hours a week.
- It's certainly useful to maintain a coherent presence on all the social networks where you want to be a single persona—and it's probably silly to think that you can maintain fully separate personas that will never be linked.
- Maybe you should be everywhere, but that way may lie madness, at least for some of us.
- Blogs still rank high on the semi-permanence scale, and it may be unfortunate that conversations seem to happen less often in blog comments. It's not the end of the world, and it's (fortunately) not the end of conversations.
- Oh, and FriendFeed is still around. As of 3:10 pm (PDT) on September 17, 2011, [the LSW group on FriendFeed](#) has 726 subscribers. It's open for more. It won't overwhelm you. It's Steve's primary professional network. Mine too.

## T&QT Retrospective

# Far-Away Services with Strange Sounding Names

Remember Cuil? A little more than three years ago, it was all the rage—a new search engine developed by ex-Googlers using “a form of datamining to group Web pages by content.” Cuil started up on July 28, 2008, claiming to have a larger index than any other search engine—120 billion web pages at the time. The company was hot stuff: It raised \$33 million in venture capital.

Back then, I printed out leadsheets from interesting discussions of Cuil, but somehow never got around to putting them together or discarding them. Looking at them now—eight of them—I see just to what extent Cuil was a two-day wonder: Five of the items are from July 28, 2008; two are from July 29; and one laggard item is from August 1, 2008. It turns out I also tagged one item on April 14, 2010. What did library folk and a few others have to say about this wonderful new search engine at the time?

## *Now what's cooler than being Cuil?*

That was Chris Zammarelli at *Libraryola* on July 28, 2008—and I can't provide a link because *Libraryola* has gone the way of Cuil, although without burning through \$33 million. Zammarelli did an ego search on Cuil, with pretty dismal results.

Of the first 11 results displayed:

Four of the results were dead links;

Two of the results were the same link;

Four of the results were results older than January 2008;

Two of the results displayed photos that were irrelevant to the links they were attached to.

There's more—but I can't discuss it, since I only printed the first page. (*Libraryola* is still around—but now it's all in some Cyrillic language, other than ads, and translating the first couple of paragraphs suggests that it's a typical ad landing page.)

## *Cuil Launches—Can This Search Start-Up Really Best Google?*

Danny Sullivan posted this [on July 28, 2008](#) at *search engine land*. That's the natural question, especially for Sullivan's site.

Can any start-up search engine “be the next Google?” Many have wondered this, and today's launch of Cuil (pronounced “cool”) may provide the best test case since Google itself overtook more established search engines. Cuil provides what appears to be a comprehensive index of the web, offers a unique display presentation, and emerges at a time when people might be ready to embrace a quality “underdog” service.

It's a thorough discussion, noting Cuil's “impressive pedigree” of founders, listing the four major areas it claimed to distinguish itself (big web index, unique relevance algorithm, unique results display, privacy) and discussing each of those.

Given that Google and Bing each now probably have many times the indexed pages that Cuil had—and that neither one mentions the index size—it's interesting to get Sullivan's immediate response to Cuil's claim to index three times as many pages as Google:

Sigh. Yes, size matters. You want to have a comprehensive collection of documents from across the web. But having a lot of documents doesn't mean you are most relevant.

That's followed by a lengthy self-quote from September 2005 (when Google stopped mentioning its size). He found the whole discussion of size disheartening and pointless. Sullivan also pokes at the improved-relevance claim at some length, noting

that Cuil seemed to be using popularity despite its claims to do otherwise.

The display difference—well, if you're one of those who likes multicolumn sets of paragraphs rather than a nice column of results, you would have *loved* Cuil. Oh, and Cuil suggested search topics as you typed—which some of us still don't much care for. Finally, Cuil claimed it wasn't logging IP information on searches. Sullivan didn't seem to think this mattered.

The final section of a *long* discussion (one that sometimes feels like an apology for Google) is "Will Cuil Succeed?" Briefly, Sullivan thinks it could "pick up a little share, maybe a point or two," but that it was unlikely to be a Google-beater, or even a Microsoft- or Yahoo!-beater.

### *Not so Cuil*

That headline was used a *lot* on and after July 28, 2008, but in this case I'm looking at [Doug Johnson's post](#) at *The Blue Skunk Blog*. Johnson did the same thing as Zammarelli—well, wouldn't you? He ran an ego search. Of course, "Doug Johnson" isn't the most unusual name in the world. He found the first page of results "let's say, interesting." I see a magazine-format page with 11 items. The first is a Wikipedia article on Doug Johnson, keyboardist for Loverboy. The second, third, fifth, and ninth are about the library Johnson. Others are for various sports-related Johnsons and one media person—and, last on the page, an odd price-comparison link. Johnson's comments?

While I did like the Lover Boy implication and that 3 of the first 10 results were related to me, none was a direct link to either my blog or website. And the pictures are a mess. Who are these people? Not me. The little graphic of the bottle comes from my column on the Education World website but is placed next to the hit on Wikipedia that lists other Doug Johnsons. (Yes, there are quite a number of us out there.)

While one of them *looks* like a direct link to his website, I'll take his word for the picture mess, especially since Zammarelli found the same problem. Johnson offers a screen shot from the same search done on Google; that one has his website first, his blog second. After that come sports figures and others. No photos and much briefer results.

Johnson doesn't really offer a critique, other than the picture problem.

### *Cuil*

Terry Ballard kept the title simple for [this July 28, 2008 post](#) at *Librarian on the edge*. Ballard wanted to see some serious competition for Google:

It's always been my fondest hope that someone would come along and give the Big G a real taste of competition. I don't have anything against Google - I just think that competition will help bring out the best in them. Naturally, when I heard about this on the morning news, I couldn't wait to try it out.

*Of course* he tried an ego search—and wasn't impressed with the results. The drill-down feature on the right side suggested as a subtopic "People from St. Louis," and Ballard isn't from St. Louis.

Most amusingly, they add pictures to each page description. In the case of my entries, there are dozens of pictures of somebody else named Terry Ballard. Their formula really should ensure that the picture comes from the page they are describing. Enough other people were interested that their servers were swamped in the afternoon. My verdict is that I love the concept but the product isn't quite ready for prime time.

By now, a theme seems to be emerging: The presentation is interesting (although I'd find it frustrating if I wanted to plow through results)—but you shouldn't add pictures to every excerpt unless you know enough to add the *right* pictures.

Wayne Bivens-Tatum used the same title for his own post—a day later, [July 29, 2008](#), at *Academic Librarian*. After trying a couple of searches, "so far I don't see why I would use this much."

I searched "academic librarian," for example. Of the eleven hits on the first page, four were to this blog. It's nice to know I have such "authority," but I thought four was about three too many. Three of the four hits had pictures of people beside them. I have no idea who the people are, but they're definitely not me. I also searched "bivens-tatum." The hits are all relevant, and there's a nice spread, but again the pictures have nothing to do with me.

He also wonders about the relevance ranking:

If the top left hit is the most relevant, then apparently a Shakespeare authorship website I made in library school is the most relevant web page related to me. Maybe they know it's the first web page I ever created, so it has a certain sentimental value.

This paragraph sums up part of my problem with Cuil's whole approach:

The layout is presumably to prevent the need to scroll, but I would like an option in the preferences to have more hits on the first page. When I'm looking for information, I want more text, rather than a

tastefully arranged page with images scattered across like knick-knacks. I might like the search results better if I wasn't ego-cuiling, but I don't think I'd like the layout.

### *cuil – search the largest web index*

That title, on [a July 29, 2008 post](#) by Michael at *infodoodads*, surprises me a little: It takes Cuil's claim at face value. The writeup notes a "startling black background" for the search-entry page and says that bigger is nice, but "it does little good if the information is poorly matched to the search."

Michael's ego search yielded his staff page in the first page of results—but it's an *old* staff page, yielding a dead link. He liked the way results are presented and didn't seem too concerned with the image-match problem, even though he does note that, on a second try, the "thumbnail" for his staff page is "from an image not found on my page." His conclusion? "Interesting. Give it a shot!"

This is the first of the posts checked that has comments—and the first of those is particularly interesting: From someone named Mike who blogged at *Buttermouth*, and who admitted to being a "Google enthusiast and loyalist" (really?)—and who clearly doesn't understand that "it's" means "it is," not "belonging to it"—the assertion is that Cuil found the old staff page because it only searches through websites established before June 2007. In the [linked post](#), he calls Cuil a "33 million dollar flop or better yet, the 'Waterworld' of online ventures" and flatly says the company "is built on FALSE marketing and inferior results." He also claims that the index size is a lie, based on a metric that is, in my opinion, nonsense.

### *Librarians Exploring Cuil*

That's the title for a Daniel A. Freeman post [on August 1, 2008](#) at the *ALA TechSource Blog*—although it turns out Freeman also posted ["A 'Cuil' New Way to Search"](#) on July 28, 2008. That first post has an interesting core paragraph, which I'll quote without comment:

Cuil is of particular interest to librarians because its new features attempt to provide a more nuanced, interactive set of search results. In other words, Cuil tries to emulate the experience of a more professional search, the kind you might get with the assistance of a librarian. For years we've been questioning effect of search engines on librarians, and due to some recent events, many of us may be wary of a search engine developing such broad power. Personally, I have trouble seeing the launch of Cuil as a detriment—call me naïve, but I think there will always be a place for reference services. Cuil, like

Google before it, will probably just become another tool we can use professionally.

The August 1 post is interesting because of what seems like a defensive attitude:

In the culture of the Internet, the sound byte and 24/7 cable news networks, as soon as something is praised, it gets torn down and trounced. This process has accelerated so quickly that it sometimes seems like the two things are happening simultaneously.

This has definitely been the case with Cuil As soon as Cuil developed a mainstream media buzz, the mainstream media was there to kill the buzz, declaring it "No Threat to Google". As anyone who watches cable news knows, it can be tough to have a conversation when all you've got is two diametrically opposed sides screaming their heads off at one another.

By comparison, Freeman finds librarians' discussion "a lot more rational and down to earth." Sure, it's good that librarians were exploring the service before attacking it out of hand—but the commentaries I saw (and cite above) are negative about Cuil *because* of the results. And I really do wonder about this final paragraph:

Google is still the unrivaled leader among search engines, and I suspect that probably won't change for a long time. But is Cuil a big deal? Absolutely. In a time when conglomeration and monopolization limit so many of our choices, Cuil is a reminder that as long as there is freedom of ideas, there will be freedom of choice. It doesn't matter if Cuil is a threat to Google or not. As the first high-profile effort to try to improve upon Google's core model, Cuil matters.

It's hard to remember the state of the art in July 2008, but I thought that both Yahoo and Microsoft (I guess it wasn't called Bing back then) were challenging Google's model. I certainly agree that monopolization isn't great (and wish more librarians would seem concerned about single-supplier futures, rather than welcoming and pushing towards them), and I use Bing as my default search engine.

*Cuil CEO Rips Users, Asks Them To Please Shut Up* Now—ignoring hundreds of other items from the second half of 2008—we jump forward to [April 14, 2010](#) and this Michael Arrington piece at *TechCrunch*. Arrington notes what happened with Cuil: Its early poor performance yielded not only criticism but poor continuing use. Come 2010, the company was launching "cpedia," an attempt to create "automated articles about queries." Arrington found the results—which, of course, now yield dead links—"sort of strange, but as an experiment it cer-

tainly have legs.” Having seen other attempts to auto-generate articles or useful pages, I’d start out skeptical and probably get more so. In any case, that’s not the heart of this item.

This is: After some negative comments on the new attempt, Cuil’s CEO wrote the kind of blog post a CEO should *never* write. It begins “Wow, the haters are out in force today” and adds this swipe at active web writers:

First up, Cpedia does very badly with people who write much more on the web than people write about them. Given the 1 billion people on the web one might think this unlikely, but it happens. When we try to summarize the information mentioning these people, we run into a problem. Almost none of it is about them. It’s about random things they have opined on. Dave Parrack, Farhad Manjoo, Louis Gray, I’m talking about you.

He continues, noting how Cpedia builds its so-called “articles”—assembling sentences from other sources, with links—and offers a truly unusual commentary on people’s assertion that the Cpedia results are lousy:

A third complaint was that our machines did not seem to really understand the material. People complained of rote recitation, rather than an in-depth understanding. It was ever so. As a child I was made to learn Irish. The Christian Brothers believed in a Platonic theory of learning, where all knowledge was recollection, so they would beat us with leather straps until we “remembered” our Irish vocabulary (this actually works). I, however, could never get full marks, no matter how well I remembered, because my Irish, while technically correct, had no “blas”.

Blas, for those of you not from the West of Ireland, is the polish a hurley gets from the sliothar when used by a player of unusual skill, a patina on the surface of the wood testifying to the depth of talent of the player that had used the stick. Fair enough. Cpedia does not have blas – it’s a machine.

Huh? Then comes the claim as to what Cpedia actually does:

Cpedia is not an attempt to build something that knows all current knowledge and can write a meaningful essay on any topic – that would be a stretch goal. Rather, we are trying solve a much simpler problem. When people search the web for information, a lot of times the first few results do not contain all the information there is about the subject. Almost no one can continue through all the other pages, because they are almost all regurgitations of the same material, with perhaps a few extra

nuggets. Cpedia processes all the pages about a topic, and extracts the unique ideas.

That would be impressive—if a computer could actually do it. Could it? Could Cpedia?

Then things get strange at the very end:

The promise of Cpedia is that you will find information that you might otherwise miss. It often works for me. Your mileage will vary. If you find that the page about you is completely random, the only advice I can offer is a poem my six year old recited at breakfast:

A wise old owl sat in an oak,  
The more he heard, the less he spoke,  
The less he spoke, the more he heard,  
Why aren’t we all like that wise old bird.

In short: If you try Cpedia and the results are crappy, *shut up about it*.

What happened with Cuil? [According to Wikipedia](#), it reached a peak of 0.2% of web traffic in late July 2008—just after startup—and dropped to 0.02% by Septmeber 2008—and down to 0.005% in October 2008. Remarkably, it lasted until September 17, 2010, at which point it was shut down, with employees informed they wouldn’t be paid. (As always, the Discussion page for Wikipedia’s article may be more interesting than the article, with many of the comments coming on July 28, 2008.)

*Who cares?*

Why spend close to 3,000 words on a one-week phenomenon that’s long since disappeared? I think it’s instructive to look back at things like this now and then. You may disagree. In this particular case, I’d argue that Cpedia was nonsense from the beginning—and that Cuil’s display confused aesthetics with usability, making it an attractive nuisance. On the other hand, the image problem was just plain faulty design and operation: Insisting on an image with every search result is nearly sure to lead to misleading outcomes.

Basically, Cuil just didn’t work very well. The results display took too much space. The images actually got in the way—they didn’t help find the right results because they were wrong so much of the time. And the index itself was apparently old. Add to that operational problems (some sites found that Cuil’s crawler was causing problems, many people found that they couldn’t get to a second page of results), and it’s scarcely surprising that Cuil cooled off very rapidly.

## Then there's Knol

Remember Knol? I do. It was an interesting attempt to provide a signed alternative to Wikipedia—that is, articles by identified experts with clear writing voices, not the bland, “neutral” assemblages that Wikipedia articles tend toward.

It came from Google—and that might have been a weakness as much as a strength. Oddly enough, the timing's similar: Knol opened for public use on July 23, 2008. By January 2009, it was up to 100,000 articles—but, since articles can be advertorials and there can be many articles (by different authors) on the same topic, that may not mean much. It's Google, so it requires real names as Google defines them (an interesting issue), and it uses CC BY licenses (although individual authors can substitute BY-NC licenses). Interestingly, Knol uses “nofollow” on outgoing links—so that Knol links won't affect search engine rankings.

I looked at Knol early on. I liked the idea in some ways—I believe the required anonymity and deliberate lack of writing style both damage Wikipedia's usefulness—but I didn't sign up, at least partly because Knol required verification with a credit card or phone number, partly because I felt no need to attempt “authoritative” articles and never lacked ways to get my own personal writing out there.

Knol is still around—but there have been no new announcements or release notes since December 2009. The address is [knol.google.com](http://knol.google.com). When I checked the site on September 2, 2011, “What's new?” articles were edited as recently as 19 minutes and one hour previously—but they were all editing changes. I'd say Knol isn't in the public eye, but clearly still serves many special audiences. Notably, it's still explicitly marked beta, more than three years after it became publicly available—unlike Google+, which lost the beta mark almost immediately. I don't see any indication of total number of articles; that may be just as well, given that an article can be almost anything. (Checking Librarianship as a search, one of the articles is—well, it's a personal webpage. The only connection to librarianship that I can see is that the article includes a list of libraries holding a particular title—and, probably the reason for the result, citation of an article in *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship*.)

### Exploring a little further

Knol is still there: That much is clear. Alexa doesn't show traffic statistics for the site (which is a sub-

domain of Google); apparent alternative names are, as I've grown to expect, parking pages or dead.

A search for the phrase “library 2.0” yields only a page in some Arabic language. Without the quotes, 59 sites show up—the Arabic site first, a long and odd article “Knol Citation Goes Mainstream” second, and an odd mix of sites after that—including “Es-senes: Did they believe in Jesus,” several iPhone-related items, still more self-references (“Knol First & Second Year Odyssey” by the same authors) and many more. (The “odyssey” says that page views passed one million in 2010, with “about 110” new articles. There's clearly a missing qualifier here; those stats cannot be for all of Knol. Articles in English that are actually about Library 2.0? I didn't find any.)

To try to get a slightly better sense of the site's current nature and activity, I tried a few things:

- Looked at “top authors” in English. The first one, Murry Shohat, has 314,000 views for 22 knols—including “How to Quickly Write a Basic Article Review” (93,000 views!), “Toward a Pragmatic and Dynamic Knol Library,” “Knol Writing Tips,” “Move that stuff: Pump Craigslist Ads with Big Pictures” and “Knol Help 911.” Oh, and “The Who's Who of Knol,” “Knol Top Authors with High Page View and Badges,” “Knol Site Metrics Reveal Good, Bad & Ugly” and “Plagiarism on Knol.” Sense a theme here? The second one, Peter Baskerville, has about 140 Knols—and most of those in the first 20 have fewer than 100 views (and are very specific accounting topics). Ah, but here's one with 13,000 views: “Knol—its possibilities.” Indeed... Third, Jagadeesh M, proclaims himself an SEO. Fourth—and the first I've encountered with more than one million pageviews—is Krishan Maggon, a pharmaceutical consultant with about 168 knols to his credit.
- Let's look at recent articles in a couple of areas, where “recent” is from August 1 through August 31, 2011 (searching on September 2, 2011). “Librarianship” yields 17. First: “Publishing your Scientific, Technical or Medical manuscript”—which is really “about” open access publishing and largely a pitch for iMedPub, a “crowdsourcing medical publisher” that is not an OASPA member. Second: “Resume Guide.” Third: “Rosetta Stone.” All the rest: sections of George Peabody's *A-Z Handbook of the Massachusetts-Born Merchant...* Knols that are even slightly relevant

to librarianship: None, as far as I could see. How about Blu-ray, a fairly popular term? Sixteen articles—how to rip Blu-rays for the Mac, another two or three how-to items, an ad knol for a wedding video firm, and a whole bunch of knols by Anonymous, rich with odd wording and legal issues.

- Well, how about Open Access? Narrowing the search to exclude the phrase within contents (as opposed to title, summary and other elements), I get down from 237 to 52. It's an odd mix, with a fair number of items from PLoS, iMedPub and other OA publishers, and nothing I'd consider to be a useful independent discussion.
- Did I mention odd wording? How's this for an article title: "Epson 8350 – the quite finest Epson that I in fact recommended" with the following abstract:

I purchased the Epson 8350 to alternate a five-12 months-age-old Sony 720p projector in my family space. Like all projectors, your app and rewards will rely strongly on your own individual dwelling possibility and lighting illnesses. My space is not going to be a devoted theater area, and has some ambient lgt through the evening.

Maybe that's a good place to stop. Clearly knol is being used by some medical folks and scientists. Equally clearly, it's rife with articles that wouldn't make the cut *anywhere* else, except—maybe—blogs. "Lighting illnesses"? Authoritative, perhaps, but not for me. (This particular writer has 15 knols to date—with a total of 375 pageviews. The one with the most pageviews, "[lg bd590 best price](#)," is fascinating—and since it's published under a CC BY license, I can quote as much as I like as long as I credit wester taslim. Here's the summary.)

Introducing the particular major Blu-Ray Disc™ Individual in which may possibly merchant at the same time since movement! The particular precise BD590 gives someone the particular really very best with all the Net as well as wi-fi access in order to be able to NetCast, nonetheless that's not necessarily each and every. Obtaining any 250GB difficult hard drive, almost all of the desired discretion may possibly have a home in 1 area, allowing one to right away recognize fresh audio, images, residence movies at the same time since LARGE CLASSIFICATION VOD by means of Vudu™. Whenever 1 gizmo may possibly offer this kind of distinct numerous residence discretion selections, an individual truly must find out —is this kind of the

particular Blu-Ray Disc™ Individual, as well as several point significantly far better?

Honestly. I can't make up stuff like that. Reading the whole article, I honestly couldn't be sure exactly what was being reviewed, although it *seemed* to be a Blu-ray player with a hard disk.

## Offtopic Perspective

# 50 Movie Comedy Kings, Part 1

After enduring the Legends of Horror megapack, this is a nice change of pace—fifty comedies, mostly very old, many fairly short. The first comedy 50-pack was revealing and frequently entertaining; I'm hoping this one does as well.

### Disc 1

*Colonel Effingham's Raid*, 1946, b&w. Irving Pichel (dir.), Charles Coburn, Joan Bennett, William Eythe, Allyn Joslyn, Elizabeth Patterson. 1:12 [1:10].

The setting is a Georgia town of 30,000 in 1940, where a good-ole-boys group of genially corrupt politicians has run things for generations, thanks to an apathetic population (less than 20% bother to vote). There's only one party, and the town still smarts because it didn't get burned down on the way to Atlanta in the Recent Unpleasantness. Into this, a long-time Army Colonel (born in this town) retires and Takes an Interest.

The narrator is the Colonel's young cousin (who never knew him), a bright young reporter on one of two daily newspapers who doesn't feel the need to cause trouble—he goes along without much thought. There's also the pretty young society editor, daughter of the former editor/owner of the paper (now part of a chain run out of Atlanta).

The basis for the plot: The power group wants to rename the Confederate Square to honor a former mayor, well known for taking the town for as much as he could. The Colonel, who's wangled a war column, takes umbrage and makes a counter-proposal, to plant a circle of 13 trees to honor...well, you know, this is the unrepentant South. The good ole boys figure to play this to their advantage: They'll plant the trees, but also build a new courthouse with, of course, the mayor's brother-in-law getting the contract. The Colonel doesn't see a need to replace the 150-year-old courthouse, brings in his friend who's the retired head of the Army Corps of Engineers to offer a second opinion, and things take off from there.

It's amusing and well played, nothing terribly serious but good fun. The motivations of the narrator are a little odd: After he sees *all* of the society editor's calves and two inches of thigh, he discovers she *has legs*—and this brings him to join the Georgia National Guard (which then gets called off to WWII) and become an advocate for reform. Truly. There are also a couple of mildly amusing running gags. Sometimes distorted music on the soundtrack, but a very good print with rich tonal range. I'll give it \$1.25.

*Country Gentlemen*, 1936, b&w. Ralph Staub (dir.), Ole Olsen, Chic Johnson, Joyce Compton, Lila Lee, Pierre Watkin, Donald Kirke. 1:06 [0:56].

How you feel about this one depends mostly on how you like shtick and the duo of Olsen & Johnson (whom I don't believe I've previously encountered). The two play con artists on the lam with a bunch of worthless gold-mine bonds who wind up with an oil-well scheme and...well, it's mostly an excuse for a remarkable series of lame jokes. Certainly fast moving and lots of punch lines; if the high-pitched laugh of Olsen doesn't drive you nuts, you might enjoy this. I'm not sure what the missing ten minutes might have added. I give it \$0.75.

*Freckles Comes Home*, 1942, b&w. Jean Yarbrough (dir.), Johnny Downs, Gale Storm, Mantan Moreland, Irving Bacon, Bradley Page. 1:05 [0:59]

A bank robber needs to get out of town, so gets driven out and takes a bus...where he sits next to a college kid going home to his 500-person burg, Fairfield. The bank robber figures this is a great place to hide out. Ah, but the *reason* the college kid's come home is largely that his pal has done something incredibly stupid that endangers the family-run hotel he's temporarily managing.

That's the setup. The reality? On one hand, there's the ever-charming Gale Storm. On the other, there's not much to redeem this flick. I won't go through the rest of the plot (such as it is) or the ethnic-humor byplay (featuring Mantan Moreland and Laurence Criner). Let's just say that, what with sound problems and occasional dropouts, I wasn't impressed. Would the missing six minutes help? Well, I dropped off during the last quarter for a few minutes—it's *really exciting* throughout—and when I rewatched it, it made no difference. At best, and being *very generous*, \$0.75.

*Goodbye Love*, 1933, b&w. H. Bruce Humberstone (dir.), Charles Ruggles, Verree Teasdale, Sidney Blackmer, Phyllis Barry, Ray Walter, Mayo Methot. 1:07 [1:05]

This one reminds me that comedies, perhaps more than most genres, are very much creatures of their time and setting. I'm not sure whether this is a farce

or an odd American version of a bedroom comedy, but it's all a little strange—and I suspect Charlie Ruggles was the chief draw in 1933, given his eccentric mannerisms and the credits.

The plot has to do with alimony, "alimony jail" (which seems to involve lavish lunches with most of the inmates dressed to the nines, while other inmates scrub floors), assumed identities, stock manipulation, a businessman finally Discovering his secretary and...well, I think there's more. Portions of the plot seemed mysterious to me, but that may be my fault. Not really knowing what to make of it, I'll give it \$1.00.

#### Disc 2

*Hay Foot*, 1942, b&w. Fred Guiol (dir.), William Tracy, Joe Sawyer, James Gleason, Noah Beery Jr., Elyse Knox. 0:48 [0:46]

This wartime B feature is a charmer—fast moving, funny and with a nice balance of logic and slapstick. Sgt. Doubleday (a *very young* Tracy), a young soldier who made Sergeant on the basis of his book learning (and apparent eidetic memory—for text, that is) is Colonel Barkley's assistant, disliked by the blowhard marksmen (Sawyer and Beery) who don't care much for book larnin'. Thanks to some plausible accidents, Barkley (Gleason) gets the idea that Doubleday, who's gunshy, is an even better sharpshooter than the two marksmen—while Doubleday's enchanted by Barkley's beautiful daughter. (This turns out to be the second in a series of six Hal Roach Studios short comedies starring Sgt. Doubleday.)

Lots of laughs as the two blowhards get themselves in trouble as they're trying to bring down Doubleday. The print's tonal range is excellent. The performances are all appropriate; Gleason is particularly good as the slightly pompous Colonel. There's one big problem: Just enough print damage (in the form of missing frames) to make some of the dialogue hard to follow. Even with that defect and its short length, this one is an easy \$1.00

*Her Favorite Patient* (orig. *Bedside Manner*), 1945, b&w. Andrew L. Stone (dir.), John Carroll, Ruth Hussey, Charles Ruggles, Ann Rutherford. 1:19

We begin with a beautiful young woman stopping to pick up a sailor who's on his way to Chicago for 30-day leave...and then another sailor down the road and another. She needs to stop off at the little town she grew up in to say "Hi" to her uncle, one of two doctors in town—but the town's grown a *lot* and her uncle's hoping she'll stay—she's also an MD—instead of taking a research position in Chicago.

Before that happens, she mistakes a test pilot for an old friend, much to his date's dismay; this confusion plays out again over a couple of days. What

follows is a series of happenstances and subterfuges with the overall effect of keeping her around...and I realized partway in that this is really an early romantic comedy with wartime overtones.

Quite good, all in all, with Charles Ruggles fine as a slightly bemused and very busy doctor and John Carroll (the pilot) and Ruth Hussey (the woman doctor) both good, as is a solid supporting cast. One review calls this “frothy” and I think that’s both right and a compliment. I would note that the IMDB listing shows this film as 1:12, presumably based on data contributed by someone who viewed a truncated release. In fact, as the original *Variety* review makes clear, the movie originated at the 1:19 of this print. Not great, but fun, a good print, and worth \$1.50.

*Affairs of Cappy Ricks*, 1937, b&w. Ralph Staub (dir.), Walter Brennan, Mary Brian, Lyle Talbot, Frank Shields, Frank Melton, Georgia Cane, Phyllis Barry, William B. Davidson. 1:01 [0:56]

Here’s another short B movie with one great virtue for a comedy: it’s **funny**. Walter Brennan—playing a crusty 60-year-old although he was a mere 43 at the time—is head of a San Francisco shipbuilding company and has been out of the country for a year or more. During that time, things have gone to hell in a handbasket in his home and his company—with his nemesis, head of an automation company, ready to take control of his company and become father-in-law to one of his daughters, while the other gets divorced.

To try to set things straight, he gets his kids and the soon-to-be ex-husband, plus his former general manager and ex-fiancée of the daughter and bossy mother of the soon-to-be-ex (who’s taken over the household and bought enough of the company’s stock to assure a merger with the automation company) out on his yacht for a weekend sail...which turns into an 8-week adventure down to the Marquesas (incorrectly labeled “uninhabited”—I’ve been there, and at least some of the Marquesas have year-round residents). At that point, feeling that he’s failed to get people to straighten up, he stages a shipwreck.

That’s just part of the plot, and there’s plenty of plot to keep things moving. A fast-paced little film with a fun cast. Lyle Talbot as the ex-fiancée is excellent, as is most of the cast. Apparently five minutes are missing, but I didn’t see any continuity gaps. I found it thoroughly enjoyable, but since it’s under an hour I can’t come up with more than \$1.

*All Over Town*, 1937, b&w. James W. Horne (dir.), Ole Olsen, Chic Johnson, Mary Oward, Harry Stockwell, Franklin Pangborn, James Finlayson. 1:03 [1:01]

Another Olsen & Johnson flick, this time with the two playing Olsen & Johnson, a vaudeville team—one that’s trying to get a musical-seal act going while staying in a cheap vaudeville hotel. They get a tiny check and are overheard in a way that makes them sound like millionaires; this leads to *Putting On a Show* in a jinxed theater; which leads to problems. Eventually, there’s a murder and, well, lots of frantic farce.

Basically, this is an extended vaudeville act. I find the Olsen & Johnson shtick tiresome after a while, which makes the movie itself a little tiresome. Also, there’s one key scene where there’s enough missing footage to scramble the dialogue. All things considered, I give it \$0.75.

*Niagara Falls*, 1941, b&w. Gordon Douglas (dir.), Marjorie Woodworth, Tom Brown, Zasu Pitts, Slim Summerville, Chester Clute. 0:43.

A shaggy dog story or curiously innocent bedroom farce, depending on how you look at it—the whole told as a flashback by a guy about to jump off Suicide Point at Niagara Falls to a peanut vendor (who apparently sells peanuts for those who get hungry on the way down...).

You see, this guy had been dating a farmer’s daughter for 20 years and finally struck oil, so now he could afford to marry her. They’re on their way to their honeymoon and encounter this apparent couple trying to fix a car alongside the road... Well, things go on from there. Let’s just say the guy’s a born meddler, the couple (who weren’t a couple, but become one) are charming and it’s all fluffy but fun, although with few real laughs. It’s also really a long short subject, too short for even a B movie. The best I can do is \$0.75.

### Disc 3

*Here Comes Trouble*, 1948, b&w. Fred Guiol (dir.), William Tracy, Joe Sawyer, Emory Parnell, Betty Compson, Joan Woodbury, Beverly Lloyd. 0:55 [0:50]

“Filmed in Cinecolor”—but this print’s in black and white, unfortunately. It’s pretty good slapstick in the service of a reasonable plot. We have a crusading newspaper publisher/editor whose police reporters keep getting beaten up and quitting and whose daughter’s in love with a returning serviceman who was a copyboy at the paper. The father isn’t wild about the copyboy marrying his daughter...and figures that promoting him to police reporter might kill two birds with one stone.

That’s the setup. Add a service buddy of the son who’s just joined the police force (and in his case “police farce” might be better), the fact that the criminal mastermind is also the comptroller of the newspaper, a burlesque queen...and you have a



very good, almost 20-minute climactic sequence. Color would have been better, and this is a short one, so I'll say \$1.00.

*Hollywood and Vine*, 1945, b&w. Alexis Thurn-Taxis (dir.), James Ellison, Wanda McKay, June Clyde, Ralph Morgan, Franklin Pangborn, Leon Belasco, Emmett Lynn. 0:58.

A romantic comedy, emphasis on the comedy, with a surround story that makes no sense. It's told in flashbacks from the office of a tycoon, and is supposed to be the story of how he got started—but there's not a thing in the picture that suggests the guy (who started as proprietor of Pop's Burgers) would go anywhere.

The flashback, though, is charming, and that's 95% of the picture. It's the old Hollywood story but with several cute twists and relies heavily on a remarkable stunt dog. Cute and well played, albeit short and with an outer plot that doesn't lead anywhere. All things considered, including its length, I'll give it \$1.00.

*Lost Honeymoon*, 1947, b&w. Leigh Jason (dir.), Franchot Tone, Ann Richards, Tom Conway, Frances Rafferty, Clarence Kolb. 1:11 [1:09]

Somewhere between a B programmer and a feature, this one's interesting—part romantic comedy, part identity confusion, with just a little slapstick thrown in. The gist: A young woman returns to the British boarding house she'd formerly stayed in, knowing that a friend of hers died, leaving two very young (twin) children who the landlady's taking care of. The woman also knows the friend was a GI bride in WWII—and apparently the husband has disappeared to America, with a known city but not address. She decides to assume the dead mother's identity (modifying her passport) and take the children to America to confront the husband.

That's the setup. Now there's the *apparent* husband—a young architect, engaged to the somewhat-shrewish social-climbing daughter of his boss. He's astonished when he gets a cable from the Red Cross informing him that his wife and children are on their way, because he's not aware that he had a wife and children. But he did have a six-week amnesia episode during the war, a period of which he remembers nothing, so maybe...

Everything follows from that, and it's actually pretty well done. The ending's silly, and maybe it had to be. Not great, not bad. Some missing frames and a problematic picture at first, so I won't give it more than \$1.25.

*The Animal Kingdom*, 1932, b&w. Edward H. Griffith (dir.), Ann Harding, Leslie Howard, Myrna Loy, William Gargan, Ilka Chase. 1:25.

I guess this is a comedy of manners, and that's the only basis on which I can call it a comedy at all. The primary character is a small-press publisher, a terrible disappointment to his wealthy father who wants him to be a Proper Person. The publisher's about to marry a socialite who his father much admires—after having spent a couple of years with an artistic woman who left (but is now returning).

I'm not sure what to say about the rest of the plot, such as it is. I found it dreary, and in fact found the movie tiresome. Myrna Loy as the socialite with a heart of dollar signs certainly makes the most of backless gowns, but I didn't find *any* of the acting worth more than a yawn. I'm being generous in giving this one \$1.00.

*Behave Yourself*, 1951, b&w. George Beck (dir.), Farley Granger, Shelley Winters, William Demarest, Francis L. Sullivan, Margalo Gillmore, Lon Chaney Jr., Hans Conried, Elisha Cook Jr., Glenn Anders, Allen Jenkins, Sheldon Leonard, Marvin Kaplan. 1:21.

[Reviewed previously](#): \$2.00.

#### Disc 4

*The Admiral was a Lady*, 1950, b&w. Albert S. Rogell (dir.), Edmond O'Brien, Wanda Hendrix, Rudy Vallee, Johnny Sands, Steve Brodie, Richard Erdman, Hillary Brooke. 1:27.

A post-WWII romantic comedy with a little screwball comedy added in, and an absolute charmer. "The Admiral" is four vets' nickname for a returned WAVE (Hendrix) after they all meet in an unemployment-insurance line. The four guys are dedicated to *not* finding jobs and living well without spending money—they work really hard at not working in style. The woman has been waiting for her fiancée to return, but now finds he's not coming—so she's heading home for Walla Walla.

It gets more complicated. The leader of the four (O'Brien) gets a phone call ~~threatening~~ promising a job for him and the others—unless he makes sure the girl stays in town. It has something to do with her fiancée and a juke box tycoon's twice ex-wife who he wants back. Things go on from there. We eventually find out *why* the leader's so intent on keeping the four together. All ends reasonably well. Hendrix is an absolute charmer, O'Brien is handsome and funny, Rudy Vallee (the jukebox king) is quite wonderful, and it's all funny and well played. One of the best old movies I've seen in quite some time. \$2.00.

*His Double Life*, 1933, b&w. Arthur Hopkins (dir.), Roland Young, Lillian Gish, Montagu Love, Lumsden Hare, Lucy Beaumont. 1:08.

A charming comedy, somewhat undone by heavy-handed direction. The setup: England's foremost

painter (Young) is an introvert, so much so that he's spent years traveling around Europe with his valet to avoid the public—even his agent's never seen him and his first cousin hasn't seen him since he was 12. But the valet is corresponding with a woman (Gish) he "met" via a marriage/introduction service and would like to actually *meet* her—and convinces the painter that they could move back to their house in London and nobody would recognize him.

But when they arrive, the valet comes down with double pneumonia. The doctor arrives, assumes that the valet (who the painter's put in the master bedroom) is the painter and vice-versa, announces him dead...and things go on from there, especially after the officious cousin arrives, regards the "valet" as an incompetent and shoos him away.

He winds up running into the young woman—who also assumes he's the valet. As things progress (including the "painter" being buried in Westminster Abbey), she doesn't much care who he is and assures him that between his modest bequest and her brewery shares, they'd be fine. They marry and they are fine—until he starts painting again, this time without signing the paintings. She sells the paintings to a framer for modest sums; he sells them, framed, to someone else for a substantial markup...and they wind up with the artist's agent. That agent guarantees them to be genuine and sells them for many times as much to a collector...who gets a bit upset when he notes a date on the back of one painting that's two years after the artist was buried. Oh, along the way, the valet appears to have walked out on his wife 25 years earlier—and she shows up, twin sons (both clergy) along, claiming that the artist (using the valet's name) is clearly her long-lost husband.

All of which leads to a trial—the collector suing the agent for fraud, the agent (who found the earlier wife) claiming that the valet's really the painter, a charge of bigamy...all eventually resolved thanks to two birthmarks.

It's an interesting plot. Gish does a remarkable job as a wholly unflappable young woman who's quite happy with her husband whether he's a former valet or an artist. Young's good also (I was thinking he reminded me of Cosmo Topper—and, indeed, he *was* Cosmo Topper). The problem? The trial is wildly overdone (with jurors acting as a chorus of sorts), other "messages" that should have been delivered once are delivered six times, and it's all a bit heavy-handed. Even with that, it's worth \$1.50.

*Boys of the City*, 1940, b&w. Joseph H. Lewis (dir.), the usual Dead End Kids/East Side Kids (Bobby Jordan, Leo Gorcey, etc., etc.) 1:08 [1:00].

I gave it ten minutes. That was more than enough. Life really is too short to sit through yet another

Dead End Kids/East Side Kids movie. The rave reviews on IMDB do not convince me otherwise.

*Escape to Paradise*, 1939, b&w. Erle C. Kenton (dir.), Bobby Breen, Kent Taylor, Marla Shelton, Rudolph Anders. 1:00.

The handsome son of a millionaire, on a cruise in South America, is hounded by one annoying young woman who regards him as her boyfriend...and manages to escape by zipping off with a young guide while ashore in "Rosarita" (much darker and less interesting than the actual Rosarito, Mexico). After cutely meeting a beautiful young woman, he decides to stick around for the 21 days before the ship stops again on its way back...and gets involved in maté exporting as a way of meeting the girl again (don't ask).

A local businessman who wants the girl for his own also wants to monopolize the mate trade and pay prices so low they'll ruin the growers. One thing leads to another (including an amusing scene of workers unloading 200 bags of mate in the hero's hotel room), and...well, happy ending and all that.

Except that it just doesn't work. For one thing, the print's lousy, sometimes so bad as to almost be unwatchable. For another, the mix of languages (in the obligatory musical numbers and conversation) is little short of bizarre. For a third, well, it just doesn't work very well even as a light concoction. Charitably, \$0.75.

#### Disc 5

*False Pretenses*, 1935, b&w. Charles Lamont (dir.), Irene Ware, Sidney Blackmer, Betty Compson, Russell Hopton, Edward Gargan, Ernest Wood, Lucy Beaumont. 1:08 [1:04]

A beautiful young waitress who's unfortunately dating a brutish truck driver gets fired because of his abusive behavior and somehow manages to lose her final check, blown away in the wind—at a bridge where she sees a drunk gentleman who seems to be contemplating suicide. One thing leads to another; she finds that he's a wealthy, well-known man who's lost his money (but wasn't really suicidal). She talks him into a scheme wherein he'll find investors for an unknown venture, using the proceeds to put her up at a resort hotel where she'll meet wealthy friends of his, get one of them to marry her, and repay the investors—and the gentleman, who incidentally is trying to avoid marrying a wealthy woman—with a premarital settlement.

Oddly enough, it's all rather innocent. We also get a former bootlegger trying to become a socialite (and his butler, who just can't stop being a burglar) and an oddly satisfying Happy Ending. The only one who winds up disappointed, presumably, is the truck driver—and that's as it should be. Not falling-down

funny but mildly amusing with a fine cast. Unfortunately, there are some missing frames leading to a little choppy dialog. Still, probably worth \$1.25.

*The Gang's All Here*, 1941, b&w. Jean Yarbrough (dir.), Frankie Darro, Marcia Mae Jones, Jackie Moran, Keye Luke, Mantan Moreland, Laurence Criner. 1:01.

The first problem is that this isn't funny—unless you're just wild about a particular brand of racist humor that was unfortunate in its day and just doesn't work these days. That's right—Mantan Moreland in full flower as a deliberately lazy bug-eyed stereotype—this time coupled with another black actor (Laurence Criner) with the name “Ham Shanks.” Other than that, it's a plausible mystery plot of sorts: A trucking company's trucks keep getting hijacked with the drivers killed, but insurance covers the losses; an out-of-work type (Darro) and his good-for-nothing sidekick (Moreland) sign up as drivers and wind up uncovering the complex situation, with the assistance of Keye Luke as a Chinese-American investigator for the insurance company.

I found the whole thing faintly embarrassing. Decent print. If you're fond of this sort of thing, it might be worth \$0.50.

*The Inspector General*, 1949, color. Henry Koster (dir.), Danny Kaye, Walter Slezak, Barbara Bates, Elsa Lanchester, Gene Lockhart, Alan Hale, Walter Catlett, Rhys Williams. 1:42 [1:39].

Here's what I said when I reviewed this as part of the Family Classics set: Wonderful, wonderful. Based on the play by Nikolai Gogol, this film is a delight—not only Danny Kaye's character but also the rest of the cast. Very good to excellent print with a few tiny flaws; fine color and sound. Even if the print was damaged, this would be a wonderfully enjoyable movie.

I usually don't rewatch movies I've already seen in another set, but for this one I made an exception. This time around, the only thing I would change is that the color is typical of aged Technicolor—that is, mostly washed out. Was I just being kind in 2005? I spotchecked that version. Turns out the movie in the Family Classics megapack and the one in this set are from different sources (which I've never seen before): The older one really is full color, but the print is sub-VHS quality, while the new one is extremely faded color but the print's good enough that, even expanding it to fill my big HDTV (for this movie, the “just” function produces a wider picture without fat-faced actors), I was never aware of video issues. (The old one, viewed on a large screen, has persistent problems.)

So: two different versions, each with its own flaws, but both wonderful—if you like Danny Kaye. It's a

great story (illiterate gypsy is mistaken for the Inspector General when he wanders into a corrupt town; just wants something to eat but winds up doing wonders) with some musical numbers and plenty of Kaye at his best. Given the washed-out color, I'll only give this \$2.25.

*The Kid*, 1921, b&w (silent). Charles Chaplin (dir., writer, star), Edna Purviance, Jackie Coogan, Carl Miller. 1:08.

*Reviewed previously.* \$1.75.

## Disc 6

*The Groom Wore Spurs*, 1951, b&w. Richard Whorf (dir.), Ginger Rogers, Jack Carson, Joan Davis, Stanley Ridges, John Litel, James Brown, Victor Sen Yung. 1:20.

Romantic comedy with a plot line that may seem preposterous, but maybe not. A beautiful and all-business young female attorney shows up at a doorway, summoned to meet with an actor who stars in singing-cowboy films (but neither does his own riding nor his own singing)—and the first thing she sees is his awful fast-draw performance. But she likes *him*, and agrees to take on the unusual case: He lost \$60,000 to a gambler in Vegas and doesn't either want to pay the full amount or have the gambler's friends-with-guns show up.

Next thing we know, she's on his private plane to Vegas. They meet the gambler, but he has other problems and postpones a meet until 2 a.m. Now the two are in a convertible stepping out to view Hoover Dam, there's some awkward/cute conversation, and next thing we know the two are married. And, as it turns out, the gambler was helped out by the attorney's father, and writes off the 60 big ones as a wedding present.

She concludes she's been had—in addition to mostly being a phony on screen, the actor is clearly a ladies' man. But she still has Feelings. Lots more comedy, much of it pretty good, although there's also a murder as part of the plot. If you accept the premise that two rational adults could meet and become engaged or married on the first date, the rest is semi-plausible. As for that premise...well, it's absurd, of course, except that I've now been married for more than 33.5 years to a woman who I proposed to on our first date.

Ginger Rogers is Ginger Rogers: Lovely, amusing, and does a great job in any role. The rest of the cast is also excellent, part of the reason this lightweight film gets a solid \$1.50.

*Heading for Heaven*, 1947, b&w. Lewis D. Collins (dir.), Stuart Erwin, Glenda Farrell, Russ Vincent, Irene Ryan, Milburn Stone. 1:05 [1:11]

The comedy setup here is common enough: Guy gets a physical exam, overhears the doctor discussing someone else's case, assumes he's dying when he's actually healthy. In this case, the background is that a small-town realtor has held on to 100 acres east of town, where his father and grandfather both assumed the town would grow, turning down offers to make it an amusement park or a cemetery or whatever...while the town continues to grow west.

After the local banker says the town would like to buy the land for a town dump and gets turned down, two guys from an airline show up wanting to buy it for an airport—and, when he won't take a pretty good price, suggest they might instead buy an adjacent 60-acre plot (which, as they note later, wouldn't work because the adjacent land is overrun by power lines). The realtor buys the adjacent land—and then finds out he's dying. Meanwhile, the banker and a swami who's been doing séances for his wife and the local ladies wants to swindle him out of most of the airline's money, so concocts a phony telegram saying the airline's no longer interested.

That's just the first part of a fast-moving plot that involves assumed suicide, hobos, applejack and an unusual séance. All turns out well. And it's actually fairly amusing, although certainly lightweight. If you're in the mood, it's worth \$1.25.

*His Private Secretary*, 1933, b&w. Phil Whitman (dir.), Evalyn Knapp, John Wayne, Reginald Barlow, Alec B. Francis. 1:00.

[Previously reviewed](#). \$1.25.

*I'm From Arkansas*, 1944, b&w. Lew Landers (dir.), Slim Summerville, El Brendel, Iris Adrian, Bruce Bennett, Maude Eburne, Cliff Nazarro. 1:10 [1:07]

The sleeve plot description is almost entirely wrong, except for the key "plot" point in this set of songs thinly disguised as a comedy: It all starts with Esmerelda, a sow in Pitchfork, Arkansas who gives birth to 18 piglets. And ends with Pitchfork (now Pitchfork Springs) becoming a state spa resort for its healing springs—foiling the designs of a Pork Magnate to turn it into the world's biggest pig farm.

In the middle, we have a Western radio big band, all of whom go back to Pitchfork for their summer break—and a female troupe of entertainers (singers & dancers) whose manager thinks the Sow Sensation should make Pitchfork a great place to play and takes them there, without bothering to find out whether Pitchfork even has a theater or nightclub (which it doesn't). Naturally, the two groups wind up in the same room & board place, owned by the sow's widowed owner, and the Western band plays a little joke on the female entertainers (who respond to a whole bunch of stereotypical hillbilly

behavior by assuming they're dealing with hillbillies) by turning into *extreme* hillbillies. Who also happen to be professional-quality musicians.

All of which is probably more discussion than the "plot" deserves. There are ten songs, all well done, in a 67-minute flick; the rest of the movie comes off as a semi-amusing wrapper for the songs. I would have been offended by the stereotyping (pretty extreme in some cases), except that the band playing with it defuses it somewhat. Oh: The daughter of the sow-owner/hotelier is the damndest yodeler I have ever heard, and the female troupe's manager does some great doubletalk routines. Amusing, and probably worth \$1.25.

## Summing Up

So what do we have in the first half of this set, which currently sells for around \$19? Looking at movies that almost qualify as classics—ones I rate at \$1.75 or \$2.00—I see *Behave Yourself* (also in an earlier megapack), *The Admiral was a Lady*, *The Inspector General* (a true classic which was also in an earlier megapack—except that the two versions are clearly from different sources) and *The Kid* (again, also in an earlier megapack). So, for me, there was only one really good movie I hadn't already seen. Of course, your previous viewing history may vary.

There are also three movies that were pretty good at \$1.50, six more acceptable at \$1.25 and another six borderline at \$1.00. That totals 19 movies that were at least so-so, for a total of \$26 for the first half—not great as these sets go, but not terrible. Then there were five mediocrities at \$0.75, one pretty bad flick at \$0.50, and one I was simply unwilling to watch (but based on way too many other flicks from Leo Gorcey and the rest of the Dead End/East Side Kids, it wouldn't have gotten more than \$0.50). You could make this out to be \$30.25, but I'll stick with \$26.

---

## Masthead

*Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large*, Volume 11, Number 9, Whole # 144, ISSN 1534-0937, a journal of libraries, policy, technology and media, is written and produced by Walt Crawford.

Comments should be sent to [waltcrawford@gmail.com](mailto:waltcrawford@gmail.com). *Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large* is copyright © 2011 by Walt Crawford: Some rights reserved.

All original material in this work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/1.0> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA.

URL: [citesandinsights.info/civ11i9.pdf](http://citesandinsights.info/civ11i9.pdf)